

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY  
AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE  
AMONG MUSLIMS IN A SOUTHERN  
SRI LANKAN TOWN

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy.

January 1997

Llyn Smith  
Department of Anthropology  
University College London



## Abstract.

The thesis is concerned with an examination of Islam in Sri Lanka. It argues that while Sri Lankan Islam shares an ideology with the Islamic world, it has a specificity which may only be understood with reference to its particular historical and cultural context. As an Islamic community on the periphery of the Islamic world, Sri Lankan Muslims find their ideology, enduringly problematic. They must continually assert their egalitarian ideology, within the hierarchically ordered cosmological universe, that they share with Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. They must further assert their egalitarianism in the face of constant forces of stratification, internal to the Muslim community itself. Islamic ideology, given this particular cultural context, is both determining and constitutive of the community. The consolidation of the varied histories of the diverse Muslim community in the late colonial period is shown to be an aspect of hegemonic domination of the community by a fraction of it.

The structure and force of Islamic ideology as revealed in Sri Lanka is discussed through an examination of religious understanding and ritual practice. The significance of the myths behind, and practices associated with, the shrines of the saints are explored and contrasted with those elsewhere in the Muslim world. Critical distinctions in the practice of Muslim saint 'worship' are discussed. The centrality of the mosque and the male religious community are examined, and the articulation of the mosque with the domestic order is clearly outlined. Sri Lankan Muslims elaborate, through their calendrical ritual, a constant regeneration of the Islamic community - *ummah*. At its most fundamental level this regeneration requires the unification of male and female, mosque and house. This practice is a constant metaphor of the original basis, and current practice, of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, founded by the marriages of Arab Muslims to indigenous women, in whose houses they took up residence. Regenerative symbols in this context are those of food and hearth, and feast practices reveal the constant constitution of the community through its rituals of communal commensality. The calendrical aspects of the regeneration are most readily determined through a discussion of the ritual complex surrounding Ramazan and culminating in the Feast of Sacrifice at the end of the Hajj. The ideological constitution of the *ummah*, at its various levels of incorporation, is examined from the perspective of the Sri Lankan Muslims. A perspective in which they as one of a multitude of specific, culturally and historically diverse communities of the Muslim world, participate in a calendrical ritual cycle, which they perceive at the ideological level, to embrace them all.

# CONTENTS

## SECTION ONE: Muslims In Southern Sri Lanka

### Preface:

Abstract . . . . .	2
Contents . . . . .	3
Figures. . . . .	5
Tables , Acknowledgements, Methodology . . . . .	6

<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> . . . . .	7
1.1 Islam on the Periphery . . . . .	7
1.2 Syncretism or Dualism: Islam in South and S.E Asia . . . . .	8
1.3 Problems and Paradigms . . . . .	10
1.4 Islamisation . . . . .	12
1.5 Islam in Sri Lanka . . . . .	14
1.6 The Research Area. . . . .	16

<b>Chapter Two: The History of the Muslims in Sri Lanka</b> . . . . .	24
2.1 Arab Traders in the Indian Ocean . . . . .	29
2.2 The Position of Muslim Traders Within Pre-colonial Ceylon . . . . .	36
2.3 The Portuguese Incursion 1505 - 1658 . . . . .	43
2.4 Dutch Repression 1658 - 1796 . . . . .	53
2.5 British Recognition 1796 - 1947 . . . . .	57
2.6 Post Independence 1948 - . . . . .	69

<b>Chapter Three: Interpretations and Contradictions</b> . . . . .	74
3.1 A Symbolic History . . . . .	74
3.2 The 'Ethnology' of the Moors of Ceylon . . . . .	76
3.3 The Ideology of Descent . . . . .	88
3.4 A Trading Community . . . . .	93

## SECTION TWO: Religious Ideology and Calendrical Practice

<b>Chapter Four: Saints Shrines: Islamic presence-Islamic practice.</b>	106
4.1 Saints Shrines - Orthodox or Popular Islam . . . . .	107
4.2 Windows To Heaven - Understanding Shrine Practice . . . . .	109
4.3 The Problem of "Intercession" . . . . .	116
4.4 The Myths of the Saints . . . . .	117
4.5 Shrine Practice Among Sri Lankan Muslims . . . . .	126
4.6 The Regional Myths . . . . .	134
The Maldives . . . . .	135
The Laccadives . . . . .	138
4.7 The Question of Identity . . . . .	140

<b>Chapter Five: Mosques and Symbolic Communities</b>	144
5.1 The Meaning of the Mosque	145
5.2 The Form of the Mosque	153
5.3 Mosque Organisation	156
5.4 The Tariqas	161
5.5 Religious Education	165
5.6 Variation in Mosque Organisation	168
 <b>Chapter Six: The Mosque - Ideology and Practice</b>	 172
6.1 The Structure of the Mosque Feast	172
6.2 The Ritual Opening of a New Mosque	182
6.3 Community Co-operation Builds a New Mosque	187
6.4 Mosque Aesthetics and Religious Politics	191
6.5 Building a New Mosque	193
6.6 The Ideology of Egalitarianism	194
 <b>Chapter Seven : Calendrical Ritual</b>	 197
7.1 The Calendar	197
7.2 Bara'at	199
7.3 The Calendrical Complex - Bara'at to the Hajj.	203
7.4 Gender and Cosmology	208
 <b>Chapter Eight : Marriage as a 'Rite of Conversion'</b>	 217
8.1 The Muslim House	218
8.2 Marriage Patterns	221
8.3 Marriage Rites	225
8.4 Ritual Interpretation	240
 <b>Conclusion</b>	 246
 <b>Appendix A : Further Description of the Research Area.</b>	 252
A.1 Weligama Traders - Galbokka/New Street	252
A.2 Maduragoda - an "out-caste" village.	257
A.3 Kapuwatta - A Rifai village.	261
A.4 Horagoda - A Farming Village	269
 <b>Appendix B : The Question of Caste.</b>	 278
<b>Appendix C : Muslim Dominance of Trade.</b>	287
<b>Bibliography + GLOSSARY.</b>	299



# FIGURES

1.a	: Location of Research Area in Southern Sri Lanka . . . . .	17
1.b	: Research Area in Detail . . . . .	20
5.a	: Location of Research Area Mosques . . . . .	150
6.a	: The Maduragoda Mosque . . . . .	192
A.a	: Weligama Town Area. . . . .	253
A.b	: Maduragoda. . . . .	258
A.c	: Kapuwatta . . . . .	264
A.d	: Horagoda. . . . .	270

# TABLES

5.b	Occupation of Mosque Trustees in Weligama 1985 . . . . .	158
5.c	Tariqa Affiliation of Weligama Mosques. . . . .	162
5.d	Villages of Origin - Students in Arabic Colleges. . . . .	167
8.a	Kapuwatta - Marriage Patterns . . . . .	223
8.b	Horagoda - Marriage Patterns . . . . .	223
8.c	Maduragoda - Marriage Patterns. . . . .	223
8.d	The Central Wedding Rites . . . . .	241
A.3-1	Employment in Kapuwatta . . . . .	267
A.3-2	Annual Household Income - Kapuwatta . . . . .	267
A.3-3	House Garden Land Holdings - Kapuwatta. . . . .	268
A.3-4	Coconut Land Holdings - Kapuwatta . . . . .	268
A.4-1	Horagoda Paddy Lands - Muslim Owners & Cultivators. . . . .	271
A.4-2	Horagoda Paddy lands - Non-Muslim Owners & Cultivators. . . . .	272
A.4.3	Horagoda High Land Holdings . . . . .	273
	. . . . .	274
C.1	Business Ownership by Ethnic Group. . . . .	288
C.2	Muslim Traders Previous Occupations . . . . .	297

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people that I gratefully thank for their advice and assistance during the course of this work. Without their encouragement I would not have been able to undertake this study. All errors of interpretation however, remain my own.

In Adelaide many members of the Department of Anthropology helped with the formulation of the project and in particular I must thank Kingsley Garbett, Susan Barham, Michael Roberts and Jadran Mimica. Financial support was provided by an Adelaide University Research Grant, a grant from the Wenner Gren Foundation (# 4762) and a Radcliffe-Brown award. I also received a Dean's scholarship at University College London. In Sri Lanka I had the constant help of many warm and wonderful people and thank the following for their intellectual assistance, kindness, humour, hospitality and constant interest in my endeavours: M.U.M. Azhar, M.A.M. Fayis, and their respective families, M.U.M. Nuwais, M.U.M. Amirudeen, Messers Hiflar, Naseem, Akhmad and Nasir, M.K.Zainul Abdeen, Moulavi Usman, H.L.N. Martin, Mahen Vaithianathan, I.V. Edirisinghe and the Department of Sociology at Columbo University and Lalitha Mutuhewa. N.P.T. Gnanadasa and the late Chandra Vitarana were part of my household and gave me so much of their knowledge and time that I can never repay them. M.M.Ifal shared with me his knowledge of local history and his profession - Geography. His knowledge was instrumental in the success of the surveys we designed and undertook and indeed this work would not have been possible without him. J.S.Z. Moulana and J.S.K.A.A.H. Moulana and their families were my greatest source of support and inspiration. They generously opened their home and their hearts to myself and my son and gave us endless love and support. Their home was always like a small piece of Heaven. Colleagues at the department of Anthropology, University College London were of enormous assistance during the writing up of this thesis and in particular I must thank Peter Fleugel for his incisive comments and warm friendship. Nancy Russell and Rohan Bastin were fellow travellers in this endeavour in Adelaide, Sri Lanka and London. Nancy worked in a Buddhist community and Rohan in a Hindu community and we met frequently during fieldwork. They were and remain a rich and constant source of friendship and ideas. They both gave me many insights into my material. I thank Nancy particularly for her insights on caste. In California I have had the unfaltering support of Pat and Carmela Wenger. I extend my profound gratitude to all of them. My son David has been my constant companion throughout this journey and I treasure his awareness and his presence and thank him for sharing it with me.. Susan Freeman has been an endless source of love and encouragement and for this I am deeply grateful.

My greatest debt is to my Supervisor and dear friend Bruce Kapferer who has been a constant champion, a source of endless practical help and an intellectual guide throughout. He generously gave me many insights into my material and his influence on my work has been enormous. The sheer intellectual excitement of his own work and his very real dedication to the discipline of Anthropology have been my greatest inspiration. I thank him for his readiness to so generously share his time, energy, insights and excitement with me.



## METHODOLOGY

The initial research period during which this study was undertaken was from June 1984 to April 1986. I returned for a further five weeks in April/May 1987. I spent my first year in the town of Weligama and subsequently moved to a nearby village (see also p16 ff1).

The research method used was participant-observation and I endeavoured to gather information as widely as I could. I used both pre-arranged directed interviews and a non-directive approach. Initially I sought to gain knowledge about the culture, the religion and the town by interviewing religious and town officials. Each formal interview turned up new social opportunities and each new social meeting provided further introductions and leads for further research. When people inquired about what I was doing I initially replied that I had come to study the culture and religion. This was somewhat puzzling to most and I modified this to say that I had come to study their history - the story of the Moors in Sri Lanka, and with this everyone was happy. The Muslims are known in Sri Lanka as a community who had never placed much stock in formal education and scholarship in and about the community has been minimal. In general people expressed their pleasure about my interest in their history and many stated explicitly that they felt obliged to assist me. Given the current ethnic struggle and the renewed stress on historical origins this is not surprising. Once news of my presence and purpose got around I was constantly invited to household and religious rituals and feasts. I followed up all leads until I reached a point where I had established firm social relationships with a number of families and from then on I felt I had both a domestic social life and a research life. Although my learning remained constant throughout my time there I then tended to explore customary attitudes and understandings in my varied social domains and histories and variation in religious practices in the wider arena.

The fact that I went to the field with a two year old son and the fact that I chose to live in an independent household undoubtedly shaped my research experience. My status as a 'married woman' meant that I was free to be on the streets, the fact that I was foreign meant that I remained respectable despite keeping the company of men in my public research. My independence meant that I was free to mix with both high and low caste members of both the Muslim and the Sinhalese communities. The research area has a Sinhalese majority with whom the Muslims constantly interact and I sought to gain information about this community also. To this end I visited temples as well as mosques, interviewed both Sinhalese business people and Muslims traders and attended Sinhalese rituals (exorcisms, weddings, puberty ceremonies) along with Muslim ones.

In order to examine more closely the increasingly obvious diversity (in both historical and class terms) between different villages in the research area I undertook extensive surveys in three of them (an agriculturalist village, an 'out-caste' village and a village that had a strong identification with a Sufi order). After compilation of village registers in each village a random sample of 25% of the households was administered a detailed survey concerning household income, land holdings, employment patterns, household wealth, education levels, marriage and residence patterns, dowries, ethnicity, religious practices and any other information that respondents chose to reveal. The survey was carried out with the help of a small team of research assistants and is discussed in Appendix A. I have used survey material to highlight different issues of significance to different villages. The village surveys allowed me to construct a more detailed picture of the nature of historical settlement and current diversity



of Muslims in the research area. This I drew into contrast with the information I was gathering in the town although I did not administer the survey there. I conducted a survey of all the businesses in the town (Sinhalese and Muslim) in order gain an understanding of economic practice and participation. Since the Sri Lankan Muslim community is consistently portrayed as a trading community I felt that I required empirical evidence of the degree of local investment. The town is a business centre and the trade that takes place in villages is minuscule by contrast so comparative surveys were unwarranted in this instance.

One of my early concerns in the thesis is to discuss the history of the Sri Lankan Moors. This was not part of my original research project but became increasingly obvious as a fundamental requirement. I could not discuss the realities of much of Southern Sri Lankan Moor life without detailing the historical background upon which so much of its meaning is constructed. My original interest in the Rifai tariqa led me to a point where I understood that its establishment in one of the villages had as much to do with contesting a present reality as it had to do with theological distinctions between different Sufi traditions. Of critical importance was the fact that this tariqa was new to the area and its establishment allowed a village to stand in a new relation to the current religious and political order. (This early work remains excluded from the thesis). The Muslims in the research area consistently reinforced my focus on history. Indeed it appeared to me that this was what made my work meaningful to them.

The sources I used were primarily secondary and those written by Sinhalese historians for the most part (but see also Mohan, 1985, 1987). I completed some archival work in Colombo on both the Dutch and British periods and I regard further archival research as warranted in the future, particularly on the Portuguese period. I also made extensive use of an edited collection of historical articles that was published in 1986 (Shukri,ibid) and which contained the recent work of a number of Muslim scholars as well. Apart from two brief texts by Mohan (ibid) the historical work in this thesis is the first attempt to interpret the complex history of the Moors in the light of its current and recent ideological and political significance.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction.

#### 1.1 Islam on the Periphery.<sup>1</sup>

Islam is rendered acutely problematic for those Muslims located on the periphery of the Islamic world. Nevertheless it has been systematically ignored in most studies of Islamic communities which have taken the religious ideology for granted. As a consequence 'Islamic ideology' has been taken universally as little more than a "blue-print of a social order" (Gellner, 1981:1). Further the entire cosmological dimension of the religion has been either, largely excluded from analysis, or subsumed within a number of dualist paradigms; folk/orthodox, textual/normative, adat/Islam.<sup>2</sup> Islam on the periphery is **no less Islamic** than Islam at the centre. In the context and dialectics of counter-interpretations of reality, it has simply taken a different form. This is the general implication of Geertz in *Islam Observed* (1971), an important point, and one I take up in this study.

There are more recent scholars who firmly reject the analysis of Islamic societies using Islam as an analytical blueprint (Banks 1976, el-Zein 1977, Eickelman 1981, Denny 1985, Kipp et al 1987, Van Bruinessan 1987, Ahmed 1991) the most succinct being Kessler who insists that Islam presents a vision of an ideal society, not a theory of an existent one (1972:39).<sup>3</sup> Islam as a given ideology is

---

<sup>1</sup> The use of the term "peripheral" has been sharply criticized by Dale (1986) who argues that "apart from the size and vitality of the South Asian Muslim population, South Asian Muslims are weary of being classed as peripheral merely because they do not have Arab ancestors" (ibid:624). My usage here reflects accurately the perceptions of this particular Muslim community which does claim Arab ancestry and which exists as a minority group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

<sup>2</sup> The dichotomy between **adat** (custom) and Islam was first applied to society in Dutch colonial Indonesia by Snouck Hurgronje and has remained a consistent, albeit increasingly honed feature of Indonesian studies (see also Hooker 1974, Harahap 1987, Abdullah 1966 and Roff 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Kessler argues that the classically inspired approach, based on "an implicit Quranic theory of society" has been "nominalist, prescriptive, anti-empirical and deductive" and has led to "an idealist political science which is inadequately historical and totally unsociological" (ibid:34).



generally understood by Muslims to reflect an ideal society (the **ummah**), which is prefigured in the **shariat** (laws), but which has never been implemented.<sup>4</sup> For an analyst to take Islam unproblematically, as a "blue-print" or "theory" of society, creates a dualist conception which denies the tension/dynamic **internal** to Muslim societies. This tension, emergent from the contradictions between the ideal ummah of the shariat, and the reality of any particular Muslim cultural context is instead located between 'Islam' (the blue-print) and the cultural reality. As a result much of the analysis of Muslim societies details their 'folk' or customary practices and defines them as less than Islamic.

## **1.2 Syncretism or Dualism: Research on Islam in South and S.E.Asia.**

Research on Islam in the Islamic communities of this region has been dominated by a dualist approach, exemplified in the dichotomy between **adat** (custom) and **Islam**, developed in Indonesia (Hooker, *ibid* Harahap, *ibid*, Abdullah, *ibid* and Roff, *ibid*) and later imported to Indian studies (Barth 1960, Ahmad, 1976, 1978, 1981, Mines 1975, 1978). This analytical construct which emerged in Indonesia was formulated as a "systematic opposition held to distinguish - culturally, socially and politically - the domains of "adat" (custom, *Ar ada*) and "hukum" (Islamic law, formally conceived; *fiqh*). This construct later became adat/Islam (Roff, *ibid*:10).

Although the adat/Islam dichotomy has been a constant conceptual feature in Indonesian studies; one which Roff attributes to "the over-determination of adat carried out by the Dutch for purposes of colonial rule," (*ibid*, *op cit*) the nature of the relationship between the two is by no means agreed, or held to be historically constant, and has been the subject of continuing debate. Hurgronje himself, expressed a certain ambivalence concerning the relationship between the two, at one point asserting their "indissoluble union" and later positing them as "mistress" (adat) and her "obedient slave" (Islam) (*ibid*, *op cit*). Later studies by Abdullah (*ibid*) and Siegel (1969) sought to overcome the simplistic, reductionist view produced

---

<sup>4</sup>Further "the social theory of Islam is sociologically deficient". (This) "untested Islamic theory of society is sociologically inadequate primarily because it is so overwhelmingly ethical and individualistic" (*ibid*:38).

through colonial rule and concomitant ethnographic pursuits.<sup>5</sup> Abdullah argues that

to construct systematic oppositions between adat and Islam, largely irrespective of social and cultural complexities means a loss of subtlety in analysis (ibid:1).

Thus Siegel argues that Achenese society was (at that time) divided into four groups;

uleebalang (secular chiefs), ulama, peasants and the sultan and his group - each of which has its own view of the nature of Islam and adat (1969:11).

This view is shared by Geertz (ibid) in his conception of Javanese Islam with priyaji, santri, and abangan variants, borne of different historical experiences and the pre-dispositions of variant social groups. Abdullah (who worked in Minangkabau) instructs us that adat itself is an ambiguous term referring to both

local custom which regulates the interaction of members of a society .. (and)... the whole structural system of society, of which local custom is only a component (cited Roff, ibid op cit).

According to Roff

Abdullah sees the intermittent eruption of social conflict in Minangkabau, consequent upon successive attempts by one or other element of the ulama to assert a stronger voice for Islam within the culture, as strengthening the Islamic component in the overall "adat Minangkabau" without destroying the notion that adat and Islam are the twin pillars of society, each in its own way necessary and justifiable, but with conflict over their precise relationship an endemic and indeed integrating feature (because of the recognition it affords both sides) of the Minangkabau world (Roff, ibid:11).

Adat then is clearly a problematic term, one whose meaning and force is to be determined in each and every specific historical circumstance, and whose meaning at a higher level is subject to change. Nevertheless, the conceptual dualism remains a fundamental component in analysis, opposed to an Islam which itself takes various

---

<sup>5</sup> It was in Dutch interests to present nineteenth century Aceh "not as a hierarchical, vertically integrated society - but as one composed of four encapsulated groups existing side by side - meeting only at the boundaries" (Siegel, 1969:69). Roff attributes a central role to Achenese studies within a wider ethnographic exercise which itself saw Java as the Netherlands' India (1985b:22). Aceh was the scene of major Dutch wars in the face of constant local rebellions against colonial rule.



forms and expressions in variant social groups which make up Achenese/Javanese /Indonesian society.

In Malaysia, Banks (1976) striving towards an actual "unity of Islamic Malay culture" (with specific ethnographic reference to inheritance systems) notes the original justification for a theory of conflicting value systems emerging in the context of Dutch colonial government.

(I)f Islam appeared to imply a society based upon patrilineal clans, like those of the Middle East, a model of society composed of conflicting value systems made sense when one found Islam in societies without clans or with matriclans (Banks,ibid:582).

Islam in Indonesia was seen by the Dutch "as a doctrine of duties"(Roff, ibid:13) so local custom, thought to be culturally prior, pre-eminent, and *sui juris* was regarded as embodying codifiable rules for the regulation of social behaviour. This

resulted in the discovery and enshrinement in a vast literature that set its face against any tendency towards more uniform systems of law for indigenes, whether engendered by the Dutch colonial system itself or by Islam(Roff,ibid:13).

The Dutch favoured traditional authority structures linked to the particulars of customary law (*adatrecht*) in contrast to Islam. Islam which "as an ideology and source of political power", had increasingly during the protest movements and development of twentieth century nationalism been associated

with appeals to the common identity (...) transcending local loyalties and opposed to the imposition and perpetuation of alien rule (ibid:14).

A contrasting situation which developed in Malaysia, under British colonial control, is described by De Jong (1960b) who observed that here, where they were spared the "discovery of customary law" during the Dutch colonial period, the formal position of Islam was stronger than in Indonesia. In this case the conflict was

between two systems of ideas and practices, both of which were considered by the society concerned as being an integral (part) of its culture, both applicable to the entire society, and both perceived as a system by inhabitants of that society(1960b:199 cited Roff,ibid:12).

### 1.3 Problems and Paradigms

The adat/Islam distinction has been overused, attempts at ensuring its analytical complexity notwithstanding. There is always for

Muslims a dynamic borne of the distinction between the ummah as actualized ideal, the society structured according to the dictates of the shariat (nowhere existent in concrete terms, though the Muslim theocratic states are emergent from a desire to establish it), and the prevailing inegalitarian social situation, in the cultural context of Muslims (anywhere in the world). This inherent dynamic makes such dichotomous analytical constructs inevitable, both in the work of ethnographers and in Muslim communities themselves. This dichotomy, is arguably more evident in the periphery of the Islamic world where Islam is less embedded and where both historical circumstances and prevailing social and cultural norms are at odds with an Arabic culture which always couches Islamic doctrine. More widely it is reflected in the continual emergence of reform movements within all Islamic communities peripheral or central.<sup>6</sup>

This inherent dichotomy however takes distinct social and cultural form in each situation and its inherent nature should not be determining of a **particular** oppositional structure. What we are alerted to is the complexity of such contrasts. If we accept that the dichotomy is a feature of embedded Islam itself then we may begin to explore its particular content and the creative articulation of Islam into peripheral (or central) Islamic worlds. In the Indonesian context there is no doubt that Dutch "over-determination of adat" was a crucial factor in giving a certain oppositional structure to the relationship between the two. A general picture emerges of the Dutch enshrinement of distinct adat systems leaving Islam as the only ideology with "appeals to the existence of a common identity" and one employed in increasingly anti-colonial contexts.<sup>7</sup> Syncretism and analytic dualisms - regardless of minute observation of dialectical relations, or changing historical complexities - nevertheless, fail to successfully come to grips with Islam as a totality in this regional context.

---

<sup>6</sup> This is noted by (Gellner, 1985:1-7) and Kessler (ibid) takes it up in a discussion of Islam used as a political weapon in the service of Malayan political movements.

<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of Islam as the remaining universal ideology is arguably a further extension of colonial rhetoric and Western analytic paradigms. Far from explaining the situation in total, it itself, cements an original and erroneous interpretation of a rigid dichotomy between Islam and adat. One factor which appears consistently overlooked is the ideological role of the Hindu-Javanese **hierarchical state** and its appropriation and subsequent transformation of Islam. This is an issue I address in Chapter Four.



A second set of major paradigms employed in Islamic studies are those which pose an opposition between a "mystical" and "orthodox" Islam (Indonesia), "folk" and "orthodox", (North Africa) or "great tradition" and "little tradition" (India). These oppositions though long prevalent have been condemned by many scholars (Tapper and Tapper 1987, el-Zein *ibid*, Eickelman *ibid*, and Minault 1984). In each case analysts have taken a normative, often textual Islam and contrasted it with the divergent customary practices found throughout the Islamic world. In this contrast, they have argued that customary practices are deviations from a true Islam, and are superstitious cultural hangovers. In further cases explicit links are drawn between women and superstitious practices. These dichotomies are readily applied, not only in the peripheral regions of Islam but constantly in the heartland communities where Islam is embedded in cultural practices to a far greater degree. However, in contrast to the dichotomy as parlayed in Indonesia, between Islam and local custom (which stand as twin pillars of society), in other contexts the folk practices are considered as low Islam, a pollution of the pure Islam by a set of cultural practices which are essentially hangovers; hopefully to be eventually reformed out of existence. This distinction between folk and orthodox is also found in the regions where the adat/Islam paradigm has already been applied but here they both sit within the Islamic side of the paradigm, a reflection of diverse Islamic practices. Thus there are constant battles among the local ulama about differing doctrinal interpretations and constant reformist movements which attempt to purify the religion of Islam by obliterating for instance, Hindu practices. Part of this is due to the fact that Islam itself, in its historical path, has long provided the context for differing interpretations and by extension, practices. Thus particularly during the post thirteenth century "fluorescence of Sufism and the Sufi orders" (Roff, *ibid*:20) which had a direct influence in India and Indonesia at the time of the regions' initial conversion to Islam, arose the idea that there were as many paths to God as men.

#### 1.4 Islamisation.

If we accept the existence of the ideal/actual conception for most Muslims, we may conclude that Islamic societies are always **societies in becoming**. This is what I would term Islamisation - an inherent

dynamic in Islam, a dynamic which is universal.<sup>8</sup> Islamisation is a movement towards Islam - becoming more Islamic, but not simply as a shedding of non-Islamic customary practices, rather an active reproduction of what is locally defined as 'orthodox' Islam. All Islamic societies have a somewhat reformist character, reflected in the dynamic tension between the Islam that is the possibility of the texts, and the reality that constitutes Islam in its 'local context' (Eickelman, *ibid*). The dynamic is universal but we can attribute no inherent universality to its content or processual structure, embedded as it always is, in historical and cultural particularity. It is an historically contingent process not a given Western category of analysis (and a process often sharpened by colonial experience). As Van Bruinessan argues

A general theory of Islamization will either have to be so abstract as to be almost empty of content, or it will have to accommodate itself to a virtually unlimited number of exceptions (1987:526).

Others have sought to overcome the stark simplicity of this dualism and to assert a complexity to the relationship between idealized and lived Islam, which takes account of historical and cultural shifts within particular contexts (Geertz *ibid*, Johns 1975, Van Bruinessan *ibid*, Harahap *ibid*, Kipp et al *ibid*, Tapper & Tapper *ibid*, Delaney *ibid*, Combs-Schilling *ibid*). Few (if any) attempts have been made to grasp Islam as a totality within a peripheral environment; Islam as it is lived in a particular geographical, cultural and historical context, which nonetheless shares a religious ideology with Muslim countries of the Middle East.

Islam itself becomes problematic in this regard and the difficulty facing researchers is to discuss Islam in particular contexts without representing it as "a seamless web on the one hand and a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other" (Eickelman, 1982:1). When discussing local meanings of Islam, moves beyond syncretistic and dualistic conceptions are rarely seen. What is required is ethnographic documentation which takes full account of local context.

---

<sup>8</sup> The concept of Islamization (Islamisation) has been a loosely used feature of many studies (Ahmad 1978, Momin 1978, Aggarwal 1978, Mines 1975, 1978). At its broadest it may be seen as a "shedding" of non-Islamic beliefs, customs and rituals (Momin, *ibid*:133). It has "been used extensively (in Indian studies) while describing efforts of social mobility of Muslim social or caste groups" (Ahmad *ibid*:191) but rarely, if ever applied to the Muslim community and its daily ideological practice.



The renewed study of Islam in local contexts involves greater attention to how religious tradition and religious organization specifically shape and in turn are shaped by the wider political and economic contexts in which they occur (Eickelman, *ibid*:13).

We need to examine the process of religious transformation, through cultural re-interpretations and re-workings of Islamic ideology. This is an approach which recognizes local cultures as active appropriators rather than passive recipients of a new religion. Following Geertz (*ibid*) it is essential to examine the world as they create it. This thesis examines the world of Muslims in Southern Sri Lanka and attempts to address the challenges of Islam in a local context.

### 1.5 Islam in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Muslim community has as its enduring problematic the fact that it must assert its egalitarian religious ideology in the context of the avowedly hierarchical cultures of the Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. A hierarchy whose force is reflected in the internal fragmentation of the Muslim community into ranked groups. These internal forces of fragmentation are further compounded by class divisions which were sharpened in the more recent periods of capitalist development.

To penetrate the **particular** world of Sri Lankan Islam, I focus on the symbolic and ritual structures which are constantly engaged in daily life.<sup>9</sup> These rituals essay for the analyst and participant alike, a view of the given cultural universe and the horizons of experience. It is impossible to understand the structure of much Islamic religious and social practice without attending to the cosmological schema in which Muslims are constantly engaged, and which imbue their actions with particular meaning. This study of Muslims in Sri Lanka is primarily concerned with the religion of Islam and with the force of religious ideology in a particular regional context which is filled with cosmological import. I explore the historical, ritual and symbolic processes of an Islamic community that is both marginally

---

<sup>9</sup> There could be more study of Islamic ritual by anthropologists, a point also made by Gilsenan (1993:280). This is surprising, for as Denny points out "Islam itself places great emphasis on ritual activities" (1985:63). Fruzetti & Ostor (1984) Bowen (1987, 1993), Combs-Schilling (1989) and Delaney (1991) have been recent exceptions.

located and a minority population. The processes which shape its religious practice reflect both the community's historical particularity and the relation of the community to the wider Islamic world. A major concern is to emphasise the creative dynamic between Islamic ideology and peripheral cultural context, without reducing it to syncretism. Syncretism denies a great deal of the complexity of historical transformation, by conceptually treating new religious ideas as simply the result of an "additive process" or a "layering".<sup>10</sup> The result is something distinct or less valued than religion proper; an adaptation rather than an entirely valid and ideologically creative transformation.

Islam in Sri Lanka presents a particular cosmological schema, a schema which itself, incorporates Islam, as a way of life, into the mythology and history of the Sri Lankan context, and further incorporates the island of Sri Lanka itself into a wider Islamic world. The Sri Lankan Muslim community traces its origins to the arrival of Arab traders on the island in the pre-Islamic period. These traders married local women and established the first Moor communities on the coast. Their patterns of settlement and articulation with the colonial regimes are discussed in Chapter Two. During the late British colonial period a Muslim revival engaged the community in a re-assertion of their particular Ceylon Moor identity (Chapter Three). Sri Lankan Muslims live in a world of Hindus and Buddhists who constantly assert, through frequent and public ritual practice, that the world is not an Islamic one; it is poly-theistic and hierarchical, not monotheistic and egalitarian. In the face of this Muslims must continually establish their ideology as having real force in this particular world. Their Islam is "imported" and must be constantly renewed. Thus their Islamic practice (and that of peripheral communities generally) is arguably more reflexive in contrast to those followers of Islam, closer to the Islamic heartlands, who may take their Islamic ideology for granted due to its totally embedded character. The second section of the thesis examines ritual ideology and practice in the community. The island is replete with the tombs of Middle Eastern saints, and shrine practices and myths are examined in Chapter Four. I discuss the symbolic and social significance of the mosque as the heart of the Muslim community, and the articulation of the mosque with the

---

<sup>10</sup> This process is the opposite of that usually understood as 'Islamisation' - a shedding of beliefs or practices.



domestic order in Chapter Five. The mosque feast is an egalitarian ritual par excellence which, in this cultural context, signs Muslim commensality in radical contradiction to the hierarchical norms of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities (Chapter Six). The calendrical basis of the constant Muslim reproduction of the egalitarian world is my focus in Chapter Seven. The issue of gender and Islamic cosmology is also taken up, both generally and in relation to this particular community, which has a gender/religion problematic of its own. In Chapter Eight I discuss the Muslim marriage ritual which is best understood as "a rite of conversion". The marriage ritual recapitulates for the community, the original birth of the community through the conversion of local women by Arab men.

### 1.6 The Research Area,

I have not undertaken the usual ethnographic study based in a single village, and primarily concerned to depict that village. As I have outlined, my concerns are with the multiple interpretations that inform the specificity of Islamic religious practice for Muslims in Sri Lanka. Thus I have set out to elaborate the cultural dimensions of being a Muslim in this context. All my research however was conducted in a small area, made up of a number of discrete villages associated with a larger urban area and I briefly describe the research area here.

Weligama, a town on the South-western coast was chosen as the area of research.<sup>11</sup> Weligama stands between the major towns of Galle (17 miles) and Matara (10 miles), and is 90 miles from the capital, Colombo (Figure 1.a). Administratively it falls within the Matara District of the island's Southern Province and ecologically it is

---

<sup>11</sup> My choice of a research area was determined by my initial research interest in the ecstatic dimensions of religious experience, in particular the performance of the Rifai Rathib by members of the Sri Lankan Rifai (Rifai'iyya) Tariqa. The village of Kapuwatta near Weligama was the only site of this Tariqa, outside Colombo, that was referred to in the literature (Thawfeeq, n.d.:121). I spent a total of 22 months in the research area, living first in Weligama town for almost a year and then moving to Kapuwatta. My research was supported by an Adelaide University Research Grant and Wenner Gren Grant # 4762.

located in the island's Wet Zone.<sup>12</sup> Within the Matara District as a whole the Muslims constitute a small minority. At the 1981 Census there were 19,457 Moors and 61 Malays, a total of 2.58% of the District's population. Of these however, 48% were located in the Weligama area making it an area of dense Muslim settlement.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 1.a : Location of Research Area in Southern Sri Lanka.**

Weligama is located beside a beautiful bay that looks South over the international shipping lanes of the route through the Indian Ocean from Africa and the Persian Gulf to Indonesia and the South China Seas. It was this location on the trade routes of the ancient world that led to the original settlement of Arab traders on the island's Southern and Western littorals. Weligama is widely regarded as one of the earliest sites of Arab settlement on the island, a town whose Muslims have always been traders. The location of Weligama beside a bay is critical in the symbolic determination of its Arab trading connections, a determination which renders the Bay itself an icon of Arab settlement. Weligama Bay is relatively secure and was formerly

---

<sup>12</sup> The island is broadly divided into two ecological zones, the Wet and the Dry. The Wet Zone with an average annual rainfall of 80 inches is subject to two annual monsoons which govern the agricultural seasons. There are two seasons, April to August - Yala and September to January - Maha.

<sup>13</sup> In 1981 there were 4159 Muslims in the Weligama Urban Council area and 3742 Muslims in the Weligama and Malipada rural areas combined (1981 Census).



the site of a busy port for foreign vessels. The bay only has a depth of six fathoms and while it was suitable for older boats with shallow draft, these days it cannot take boats of more than forty tons. As a consequence of this and the establishment of the island's major port in Colombo it has lapsed in importance.<sup>14</sup> Today the bay is only used by the local Sinhalese fishermen whose small out-rigger canoes are pulled from the water to rest all along the beach, while the larger boats of the fishing fleet ride at anchor in its Western, deeper and more sheltered end.

In 1981 the town had a total population of 18,000 within the Urban Council area and of these 23.24% were Muslim, while the majority (74.96%) of people were Sinhalese and predominantly Buddhist. The Muslims are virtually all Ceylon Moors with a few cases of recently converted Tamil Hindus or Sinhalese women who have converted to Islam and married Moor men. There are also small numbers of both Sinhalese Christians and Tamils. In 1981 Sri Lankan Tamils constituted 1.14% of the population and many of them had business interests in the town. They left after their shops were burnt during the island-wide ethnic riots in July 1983.

The town of Weligama (Sinhala - sandy village) some 500 yards from the beach, is slightly below sea-level in a region which contains black fertile soil suitable for paddy cultivation. All the villages in this belt surrounding Weligama are inhabited by Sinhalese cultivators, with the exception of Horagoda. The land near the sea-shore is a salty white sandy soil where coconuts are cultivated and further inland behind the town the land rises gradually to the highlands which are clay-red soils used for the estate cultivation of rubber, cinnamon and tea. All the major estate and plantation areas are located well North of the coast towards the central highlands and the estates in this area are comparatively small. The Polwatha Ganga (Polwatha River) which rises in the Southern part of the central hill-country passes through the Weligama area for a distance of some twenty miles and runs through the Eastern side of

---

<sup>14</sup> It would appear that Galle was always the premier port of the Southern Province and the Galle Fort area today remains a predominantly Muslim area of settlement and host to many Muslim Gem Traders. During the Dutch period however Weligama increased in importance as a site where traders could avoid the customs duties imposed by the Dutch and policed through their forts at Galle and Matara.

the Weligama town area to the sea. The river is used for washing and bathing by people in those villages located along its banks. It is also used by a number of copra and coir industries in the Sinhalese Pelena and Polwatta areas for the rotting of coconut husks to produce coir fibre which is later made into rope. This is achieved by the use of coir pits constructed near the river banks where the husks are left to rot.<sup>15</sup>

Sinhalese and Muslims live in inter-spersed, yet largely ethnically discrete areas throughout the town. In the surrounding district, villages are ethnically discrete, though Sinhalese villages far outnumber those of Muslims who are a predominantly urban population.<sup>16</sup> There were also several families of Indian Tamil Hindus living in the town, some of whom lived in the unused stalls of one of the markets. Most of them depended on street-sweeping and poorly paid casual labour for a living, with a couple of the women working as **shastra-kariya** (fortune tellers). These people are known locally as Estate Tamils, and are the descendants of indentured labourers brought to the island by the British, to work in the highland tea plantations.

The research area included all the Muslim villages within the vicinity of Weligama and all areas of Muslim settlement within the town itself.<sup>17</sup> The villages outside the town are Kapuwatta, in the Denypitiya area, Koledande and Wellipitiya (Figure 1.b). These villages are connected to each other and to Weligama through trading connections and marriages, and on occasion they participate collectively in religious rituals. I also included one other village outside this immediate network. This was Horagoda, a town of Muslim

---

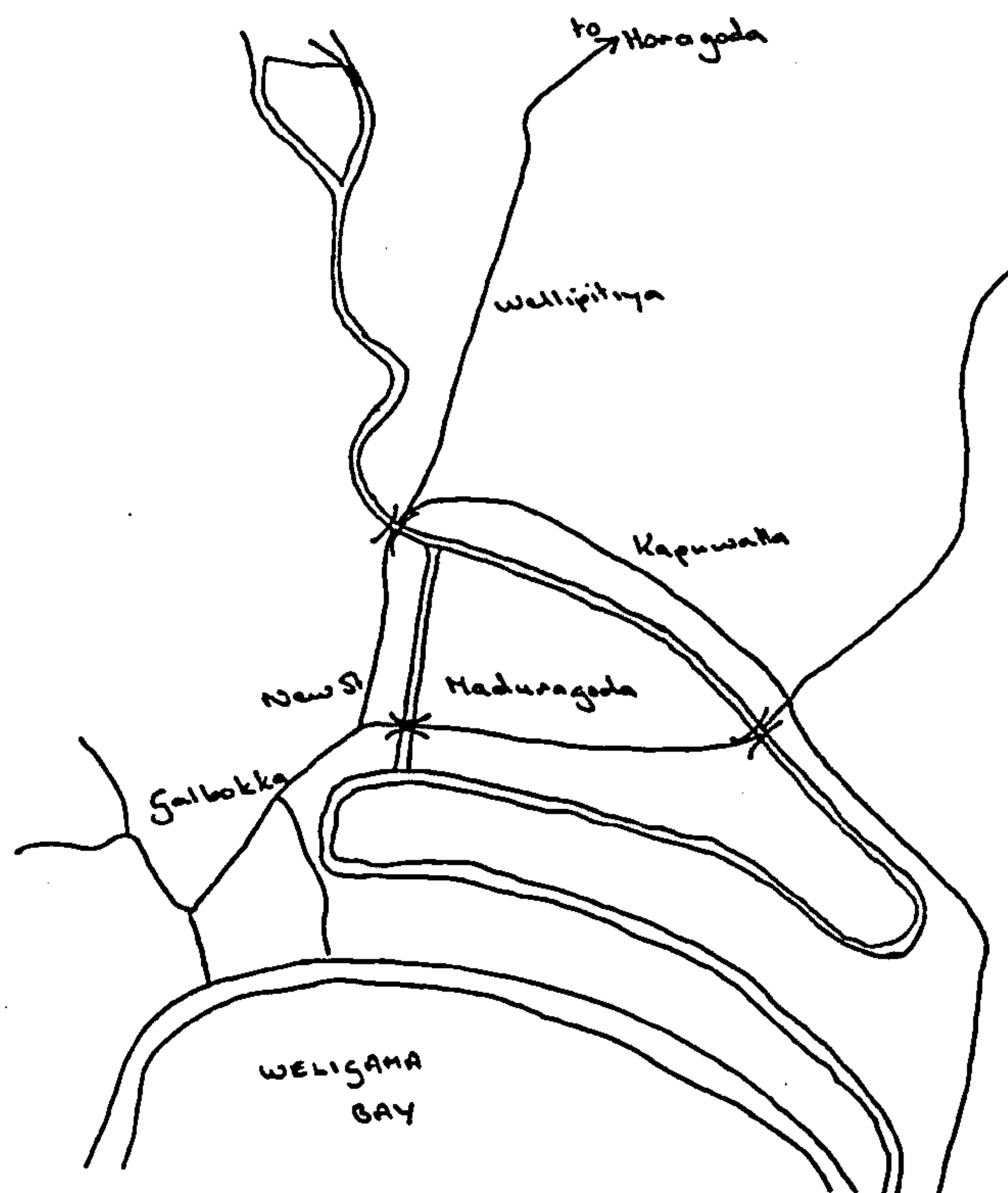
<sup>15</sup> The name Polwatta (Polwatha) in Sinhalese means coconut garden. There is a local tradition that this area was the home of the island's first coconuts and one particularly prized variety, (**kiri pol** or **dekiri pol**, Sinhala - milk coconut) is only found in the Weligama area. Some informants believe that the town itself, was once known as Pol gama - coconut village.

<sup>16</sup> It was always possible to determine the ethnicity of an area by the animals in evidence, with the presence of goats indicating Muslim settlement and the presence of dogs indicating a Sinhalese area. Muslims have strong ideological objections to dogs and will never touch them, while goats in this area are never milked but kept solely for their meat. As Buddhists will not slaughter animals they had no reason to keep them. Further afield, Christian areas could always be identified by the presence of pigs.

<sup>17</sup> The town areas I discuss are Galbokka, New Street and Maduragoda.



cultivators, eight miles from Weligama, between Wellipitiya and the major inland commercial town of Akuressa. Although it is more closely tied religiously and economically to Akuressa, Horagoda does have some economic links with Weligama and Wellipitiya Muslims and a religious tie to Kapuwatta.



**Figure 1.b : Research Area in Detail.**

When discussing the diversity of the island's Muslim community I later imply a certain homogeneity about the Muslim populations of the South-west, and indeed they do share a cultural milieu and common religious orientation to the world. There are however significant distinctions between the populations of different villages, in their current economic and political standings and in their histories and myths of settlement. Within the relatively small social field of the research area there are villages established by Arab traders who settled here, by Indian Muslims expelled from the Kandyan Kingdom by the Sinhalese King, and by Arab traders who were forced to flee from the coastal town of Dondra by the Portuguese. Despite the diversity however, this group of Muslims, as part of the South-western coastal group of Muslims, is relatively homogeneous, when wider island diversity is taken into account.



This historical diversity within the research area is reflected in tensions in the social order and ongoing ideological friction. The friction is most evident in the ideas which govern different social and religious practices and less often expressed in explicit ideological debate. The major concerns which underlie these differing interpretations and practices are those of Arab ancestry and the ideology of trade. Tension arises concerning the legitimate domination of the community by those whose claims to the first, and practice of the second, are most widely recognized. Thus tensions which are essentially those of class, are elaborated within the realm of a particular Islamic discourse, in which the governing ideas are those of social ranking based on Arabic purity on the one hand, and the ideal of a unified, egalitarian community on the other. The existent social order is radically fragmented by great disparities in wealth and vastly different status positions arising in part from Arab or non-Arab origins. The contradictions borne of this social reality which stands in stark contrast to an egalitarian ideal generates a constant communal dynamic which seeks to resolve them. The dynamic nonetheless contains the seeds of its own refutation. The idea of Arab traders as the basis of a pure Islam on the periphery, itself reinforces the idea of rank which counteracts the egalitarian ideal.

In order to briefly highlight some of these tensions my discussion focuses at times on three distinct villages (Maduragoda, Kapuwatta and Horagoda) and the Muslim traders of the town itself. **Maduragoda**, although strictly part of Weligama town, is a distinct village entirely inhabited by people known as **Ande** or "out-castes".<sup>18</sup> Maduragoda was divided from the adjacent town areas, by a

---

<sup>18</sup> Muslims in Sri Lanka divide themselves internally, into five ranked 'castes' which are, for the most part, endogamous. The five groups in rank order (highest to lowest) are (1) **Moulanas**, - the descendants of the Prophet, (2) **Nala Manichal** - "good people", the descendants of Arab traders, (3) **Ostas** - the barber caste, (4) **Moulas** - the newly converted Muslims, and (5) **Ande** - the "out-castes". (Excluded from this reckoning are the Shia Borahs and the Sunni Malays, who are regarded as separate ethnic groups). Although the Muslims use the term **shazi** (jati - caste) to refer to these 'caste' groups it does not imply a caste **system** in the terms that Dumont (1980) has outlined. He argues that caste is a purely Hindu phenomenon, borne of an internal hierarchical relation between the pure and the impure. Dumont would insist that the use of the term caste be restricted to India. I take this up below (in Appendix B) but for the present Muslim 'castes' are to be taken as endogamous, ranked groups.

substantial channel dug during the Dutch period, to prevent periodic flooding of the Polwatha Ganga. **Kapuwatta** is the site of an ecstatic religious sect, the Rifai Tariqa, to which most Kapuwatta villagers belong. **Horagoda** was included, because the Muslims there, in contrast to all other Muslims in the area, are agriculturalists and not traders. All three villages were surveyed in detail because they exhibited distinct characteristics which rendered them particularly relevant to a discussion of Islamic ideology within the Muslim community.<sup>19</sup> The Muslims of **Weligama** itself are an urban trading community of long standing and in this case my survey was specifically concerned with trade.<sup>20</sup>

These four village communities were the main areas in which I worked. However, I also regularly visited mosques and households in all the areas of Muslim settlement in the vicinity of Weligama.<sup>21</sup> All the data that I collected and which I discuss in detail later in the thesis was collected in this area. I have included a far more detailed description of these villages, highlighting their distinct histories and current economic and social position in Appendix A.<sup>22</sup> There is a great diversity to be found among the Sri Lankan Muslim community in terms of class, background and religious practice. The research area mirrors much of this wider diversity.

---

<sup>19</sup> With the help of research assistants I compiled a population register of the inhabitants of every house in the villages of Maduragoda, Kapuwatta and Horagoda. This provided detailed information about the number of families in each house, the marriage patterns, numbers of children and also about family members employed elsewhere. In each household we completed a genealogical chart that enabled us to compile a single chart for the entire village. Twenty-five per cent of the houses in each village were then randomly selected and surveyed in far greater detail (see Appendix A). This survey was intended to capture the diversity of the villages and to illuminate the shared ideology and practices.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix C for detailed discussions of both Muslim dominance of trade in this predominantly Sinhalese area and also the structure of trade.

<sup>21</sup> I also made frequent trips to Galle, Matara, Akuressa and Colombo to meet Muslims and observe domestic and mosque rituals. Further afield I visited shrines in Kurenagala, Kandy and Kalmunai on the East coast.

<sup>22</sup> Each village has different employment characteristics, and reveals certain traditional fields of employment associated with it. Here my concern is an initial brief description of the area in which I worked.



The particularity of Islam and its cultural context shape the practice and lived experience of any given Muslim community. My ethnography is focused on the Muslim community of a region in Southern Sri Lanka - it is a study of the specificity of a Muslim community. This is a minority community in the midst of an island-wide ethnic conflict between Sinhalese Buddhists and the Hindu Tamils with whom the Muslims share the Tamil language. They are far from the Middle East and the origins of their religion. "Religion" and "origins" are crucial features of the deadly discourse in which they are enmeshed.<sup>23</sup> The term 'periphery' has an added meaning here.

It is Islamic ideology, as revealed through historical action and religious ritual, and as engaged in political and religious practice, which holds this Muslim community together. The ideology of Islam is one which strives to eliminate difference, and Muslim identities, through time, may come closer and closer to the undifferentiated egalitarian possibility. These communities will inevitably always reflect some degree of cultural and historical distinction. Islamic ideology also however, recognizes difference, and it is the tension between the recognition of difference on the one hand, and its elimination on the other, which is a fundamental tension of Islamic life on the periphery.

---

<sup>23</sup> I do not take up this issue at length although its impact on the Muslim community is considerable. I point out that in this particular current political context - questions of ethnicity, religion and origins, sharpen the community's perceptions of itself as marginalized in local politics and peripheral religiously.



## Chapter Two :

### **The History of the Muslims in Sri Lanka**

The history of Muslim settlement on the island begins with the settlement of Arab traders in Ceylon.<sup>1</sup> These traders are believed to have converted to Islam shortly after its rise in the Middle East. The present community is composed of diverse ethnic elements which over a long period of time have come to understand themselves broadly as members of a single **Muslim** community. The complexity of historical settlement is reflected in multiple and diverse historical interpretations which over time have begun to assume a more coherent and symbolic form. The original diversity in ethnic, cultural and occupational fields has been gradually transformed and amalgamated as the community has come to participate in politics on the national level. An examination of this process, which began in earnest in the late nineteenth century, traces the development of hegemonic control of the community as a whole by a fraction of it.

At the broadest level the Muslims could be classified as traders and agriculturalists. It has always been the traders who have been the most influential in the island's history. The itinerant, petty traders exercised influence simply through their greater numbers and their critical transformative role in the island's economy, and those traders engaged in the import and export of luxury goods, though perhaps fewer in number, were more influential in terms of their direct relations with the indigenous rulers and power brokers here and abroad. This chapter traces the history and development of a competitive trading community as it charted its way through relations with local rulers, attacks by hostile colonial powers, and finally the demands of communal politics and the discourse that emerged in the late British period. This discourse continues to develop and transform, but the framing of the discourse has been set. The elements of that framing reflect the wider communal, political and religious concerns of the dominant Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities. The unity that the Muslim community has today was forged during this process as the community was forced to

---

<sup>1</sup> The name of the island was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972. Henceforth I will refer to it as Ceylon in my discussion of the period prior to this.

develop a common identity, and to some extent to adopt a common history.

Sri Lankan Muslims are a minority religious community who constitute only 7.64% of the island's population.<sup>2</sup> The Sinhalese Buddhists are the dominant religious community comprising 69.31% of the population. The Tamil Hindus comprise 15.46%, the Christians (Sinhalese and Tamil) 7.49% and others the final 0.10%.<sup>3</sup> Historically and ethnically the Muslims are a disparate group of whom the majority are the Ceylon Moors (6.5% of the total population). Ceylon Moors trace their origins to the arrival of Arab traders from the Middle East. The Indian Moors or Coast Moors (0.2%) trace their origins to India, while the Malays (0.3%) trace theirs to Java and Sumatra.<sup>4</sup>

The term **Moors** was first applied to the island's Muslims by the Portuguese, and later adopted by them. The Portuguese drew a distinction between Ceylon Moors, those accepted as the descendants of Arab traders and permanently domiciled on the island, and the Coast Moors or Indian Moors, understood as Hindu converts to Islam, whose permanent homes were in India but who lived periodically on the island for trading purposes.<sup>5</sup> Part of the Portuguese concern was to diminish indigenous Muslim trade which stood in direct competition with their own economic interests. Both Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors are extensively engaged in trade and commerce and are renowned for their ubiquitous settlement throughout the island.<sup>6</sup> In the Eastern

---

<sup>2</sup> 1981 Census cited Mahroof (1990:64 ff4). Census figures in Sri Lanka are compiled by "religious" and "racial" classification (Mauroof, 1980:185).

<sup>3</sup> 1981 Census cited Ali (1986b:147).

<sup>4</sup> 1971 Census cited Phadnis (1979:30). The term "Malay", persistently applied by the British is a misnomer, reflecting the linguistic unity of the community based on its use of Malay as a lingua-franca and not their widespread Indonesian origins (Hussainmiya, 1986:280-292).

<sup>5</sup> Among Indian Moors are those who immigrated from South India to work on the plantations during the British period (Phadnis, ibid:29).

<sup>6</sup> The first formal recognition of these two distinct groups appeared in the 1911 Census with the separate enumeration of Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors, a move which quantified indigenous and non-indigenous populations (Phadnis, ibid:29). It is clear that the distinction had a popular currency long before this. Ramanathan (1888:241) delineates the terms applied to these groups by the



Province however most Muslims are cultivators and it is here that they constitute a significant proportion of the population. Numerically the greatest concentration of Muslims is found in the Colombo district followed by Amparai district in the Eastern Province and the Kandy district in the Central Province.<sup>7</sup> Both of these groups speak Tamil domestically, and often Sinhalese as well in the predominantly Sinhalese areas.<sup>8</sup> The Muslim Malays were originally brought in by the Dutch as mercenaries. They came from Java, Sumatra and Malacca and were historically domiciled in the Slave Island district of Colombo.<sup>9</sup> They joined the British regiment when the British defeated the Dutch and more recently have sought employment in the police force and fire brigade. Another fraction of the Malay community is composed of fishing folk, domiciled in Hambantota in the

---

Muslims themselves. They referred to Ceylon Moors as **Chonahan** and to Coast Moors as **Chammankaran**. These terms are more often rendered as **Sonahar** and **Sammankaras** (see Mohan, 1987:9). The Sinhalese called them indiscriminately **Marrakkalaha**. This term is more often rendered as **Marrakar** and is understood as deriving originally from a caste/class among the Mappilas who were maritime traders from Cochin, the name referring to their navigational skill and occupation as sea-men (Indrapala, 1986:118). Yalman (1971:283) erroneously suggests that the term derives from Morocco.

- <sup>7</sup> Muslims as a percentage of the provincial population:
- |                                |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Amparai (Eastern Province)     | 45.9% |
| Trincomalee (Eastern province) | 32.3% |
| Mannar (Northern Province)     | 26.8% |
| Batticaloa (Eastern Province)  | 23.9% |
- (Figures from 1971 Census, cited Phadnis, *ibid*:31).

<sup>8</sup>In the Kandyan area for example Muslim students are often instructed in the Sinhalese medium (Phadnis, *ibid*:op cit). In the North, East and South students are instructed in Tamil and take Sinhala as a second language. Most Muslim men (outside the Eastern Province) are expected to be bi or tri-lingual owing to their employment. The women speak Tamil except for the Sinhalese dominated areas of Nuwara Eliya and Kandy (*ibid*, op cit).

<sup>9</sup> These Malay mercenaries were not the first Malays in the island. There are accounts in the Sinhalese chronicle, the **Culavamsa** (*ibid*, LXXXIII:36-51, cited Hussainmiya, *ibid*:282) of an invasion by Chandrabhanu, a Buddhist king of the Malay peninsula, determined to possess the relics of the Buddha (Mohan 1985:9). Chandrabhanu ruled in the Kingdom of Jaffna for fifty years in the thirteenth century (K.M.De Silva, 1981:67). Another group brought in by the Dutch were political exiles and members of the Javanese royal family exiled in the island. Within the research area, a relatively inaccessible interior Sinhalese village, Sultanagoda (Sin. - Sultan village) is held by many to be the site of captivity of Bulthul Mas Sultan. (This name does not feature in a list of Javanese royal exiles provided by Hussainmiya (*ibid*:286-288), but it could be Pangeran Adipati Amangkurat III, known in Javanese history as "Sunan Mas", banished in 1708 and held in nearby Galle, or perhaps one of his sons).



Southern Province.<sup>10</sup> The Malays speak a creole Malay domestically, and those domiciled in Colombo are commonly assumed to also speak Tamil, Sinhala and English.<sup>11</sup> The Moors and the Malays are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i madhhab.<sup>12</sup>

There are small numbers of Sunni Memons (of the Hanafi madhhab) who are chiefly engaged in the textile trade in Colombo.<sup>13</sup> Another small but visible group is comprised of wealthy Shi'a Borahs belonging to the Mustalian Da'udi branch of the Isma'ili sub-sect.<sup>14</sup> From Gujerat and Bombay, they speak Gujerati domestically and are extensively

---

<sup>10</sup> Hambantota is taken from *sampan*, a Malay word of Chinese derivation for boat (Hussainmiya, *ibid*:281). In both the Colombo and Hambantota Districts the Malays accounted for 1% of the population in 1971. In other Districts they were never more than 0.3% although Kandy was a significant site of settlement. (Colombo -26,479, Hambantota-3,256, Kandy-3,177), (Phadnis, *ibid*, *op cit*).

<sup>11</sup> Mohan (1985:42-43) argues that this community is losing its endogamous character and that marriages are increasingly being contracted with non-Malays. This fact was also noted by a British Officer as early as 1802 (Hussainmiya, *ibid*:280). This is not consistent with the ideas about this community that I encountered in the South, where the Malays are regarded as a separate ethnic group who maintain their boundaries. Perhaps this is due to their closer location to the Malays of Hambantota who are generally regarded as more conservative than those of Colombo (see also Mauroof, 1990 for discussion of the Malay community).

<sup>12</sup> There are four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (Ar. madhhab); Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. The Shafi'i school or rite is maintained throughout the Indian Ocean littoral, from East Africa to the Malabar Coast and South-East Asia where small colonies of Arab traders settled in the early centuries of the Christian era (Forbes, 1981:66-67, ff54). This contrasts with North-West India and Bengal where the majority of adherents to Islam follow the Hanafi madhhab (*ibid*:60). The Shafi'i school has predominated in South-East Asia from the time of its initial conversion to Islam (Roff, 1985:27 ff20). South-East Asia is a region where later widespread conversion was related to the influence of South Indian Muslim traders.

<sup>13</sup> They numbered 3,000 in 1981 (Census on Population and Housing, cited Samarasinghe et al, 1986:237). See Moosajee (1986:311-317) for a full discussion of Memons and Borahs in Sri Lanka.

<sup>14</sup> This community numbered 1,800 in 1981 Census (*ibid*, *op cit*). The term Borah is taken from the Gujerati word *vohuru* meaning trade, and thus reflects their occupation (Ahmad 1969:22), (Moosajee, *ibid*:313).

engaged in commodity trading.<sup>15</sup> Although the Shi'a Borahs maintain group boundaries in matters of worship and marriage, they are active in the welfare concerns of the larger island community of Muslims.<sup>16</sup> There were also small numbers of "Afghan", Pathan and Bengali Muslims (all Sunnis), whose specific histories have not been documented and who have blended with the larger community.<sup>17</sup> The trading habits and histories of these groups are reflected in their settlement patterns and the fact that they are an urban population to a greater extent than the average. In 1963 38.9% of Muslims were urban versus a national average of less than 20% (Samarasinghe et al, 1986:257).

Despite vast ethnic differences and points of historical origin, these very disparate groups have come to understand themselves as part of a single Muslim community. The process of the emergence of the Muslim community as a separate, identifiable religious community which proclaims its own internal religious unity has taken many centuries, and is due more to outside forces than to any unificatory factor inherent in the ideology of Islam itself. But the process of engagement with historical forces has been, to a greater and greater extent, determined and organized through the adoption of a **particular** Islamic religious ideology on the wider political and economic front. The complexity of their original settlement, and the condensation of

---

<sup>15</sup> The Da'i is the regional spiritual leader of this earthly community. The line of Imams remains unbroken but hidden; this belief marks a major division between Shi'a and Sunni groups. The Shi'as broke away from the Sunnis after the murders of Ali and his son Hussain and they later developed and maintained a belief in the coming of the twelfth imam (Endress, 1988:43). The origin of the Gujarati community may be traced to the arrival in the eleventh century of missionaries from Yemen who converted numbers of Naga Brahmins and Baniyas (Moosajee, ibid:313). Gerholm (1977:34) refers to pilgrims coming to Yemen to visit an Isma'ili shrine (see also Moosajee (ibid:314) re pilgrims coming to Gujarat).

<sup>16</sup> Mines (1972) discusses the formation among Indian Borahs of corporate associations with the explicit aim of achieving "the economic and social uplift of their (...) members" (ibid:104). This process may also be observed in the Colombo Borah community who are a very tightly knit, mutually supportive and wealthy group, who still contract marriages in Bombay and retain extensive links there. The Da'is active spiritual leadership of the Colombo community is organized these days through a daily telex link.

<sup>17</sup> Moosajee states that the "Afghans" were Muslims from Baluchistan whose business was small scale money lending (ibid:312).

that historical diversity into a coherent identity in the face of colonial opposition, requires a brief elaboration of the history of the Muslims in the island.

The Muslims have always been peripheral to major lines of scholarly enquiry which have tended to focus on the rise and fall of the various Sinhalese and Tamil dynasties, so historical evidence is slight.<sup>18</sup> My goal is to broadly characterize the major themes of the various periods of pre and post-colonial rule rather than to attempt detailed historical examination.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.1 Arab traders in the Indian Ocean.**

In tracing the history of the Muslim community on the island and the Muslims' active role in the economy, it is necessary to focus continually upon the development of an indigenous trading/merchant class, and the role of a particular religious fraction within it. Prior to that however, it is necessary to describe the conditions of trade in the Indian Ocean, a lucrative and well-established mercantile arena that extended from the Red Sea and East Africa to Sumatra in the East and the China Sea in the North. It was their participation in this trade which first led 'Arab' traders to the ports of Ceylon.<sup>20</sup>

The island was well known to the traders of the ancient world for its pearls, gems, elephants, and ivory, and renowned for its cinnamon which supplied the Venetian and Middle Eastern spice markets. Known to the Romans as Taprobane, and to the Arabs as Serendib (the land

---

<sup>18</sup> See Shukri (1986) and Mauroof (1990:171-172, 1980:183). Both scholars bemoan the lack of attention to Muslim history in the island in the past and both have made significant efforts in that direction in recent publications (see also Ali, 1986a:235 and Ma'ruf [formerly Mauroof], 1986:322).

<sup>19</sup> My specific concern at this point is with the development of a "Muslim" identity (or the extent to which this can be argued to have taken place) at the national level. When discussing the research area in particular (Chs 4-9) I will focus more directly on specific regional histories, although similar themes will emerge and will be seen to reflect a similar orientation to the discourse, thus establishing its widespread influence.

<sup>20</sup> At no time was this trade purely Arab, in terms of either shipping or traders (Kiribamune, 1986:89).



of rubies), it has a prominent history in the trade of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.<sup>21</sup> Both Romans and Arabs had discovered its resources in the first century AD and they were followed by Greeks, Persians, Sabeans (from Yemen) and Chinese. It was only the Arabs however, who settled there and made it a permanent home (Mohan, 1985:2). Miller (1976:40) has suggested that these settlements date from the first century.<sup>22</sup>

Two instrumental factors in this particularly Arab choice to settle in the island were, a long history in "Arabia" of engagement as sea-farers and traders and the conditions of shipping at the time. The location of Arabia in a strategic position commanding the sea-ways of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea made it a vital intermediary in the ancient trade between the major civilizations of East and West (Hourani, 1963:4-5). Its people were experienced sea-farers and they had acted as maritime middlemen from the sixth century BC (Kiribamune, *ibid*:90). Similarly Ceylon stood, fortuitously located, between Arabia and the route to the Malacca straits, the South China Seas and the major Eastern ports of Sri Vijaya, Canton and Nanhai. Trade contacts appear to have been established between the Near East and Ceylon as early as the fourth century B.C. (Tibbetts, 1956:184). By the fifth century A.D. we have evidence of Ceylon's articulation into the China trade, through connections between Trincomalee on the East Coast of Ceylon, and Tamlook near the mouth of the Hooghly River in the Bay of Bengal which was a crucial port in the China - Ceylon trade. By the ninth century A.D. the Arabs were using South Indian ports as an advanced base for their own China trade (Indrapala, 1986:117).

---

<sup>21</sup> Alternatively **Sarandib** (Kiribamune, *ibid*:98). These have been the most common terms in the literature but Shukri notes that **Jaziratul Yaqut**, - Island of Rubies was the Arabian term (Hourani, *ibid*:71, Shukri, 1986:337 cites Nafis, 1940:221). Marco Polo who visited the island in the late thirteenth century, noted that the name applied "for in this island, and nowhere else in the world, are produced superb and authentic rubies" (Marco Polo, 1987:259). It is also clear that this trade was one in which Europe was only peripherally involved. As Marco Polo himself pointed out "You must not suppose that diamonds of the first water come to our countries of Christendom" (*ibid*:273).

<sup>22</sup> Forbes, discussing Arab settlement on the nearby Malabar coast in Southern India notes that "the South Arabian Kingdom of Saba", which flourished circa 500 B.C., is said to have sent out merchant colonists to India" (*ibid*:67).

Even after the discovery of the monsoons and wind systems of the Indian Ocean, which permitted travel across the Indian Ocean from East Africa, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to the Far East, it was still essential to break these journeys on the Western coasts of Ceylon or India.<sup>23</sup> The boats of the Arabs and Persians were built from wooden planks held together with coir (coconut fibre) ropes and regular overhauling was critical. Early mariners required as well as trade items, safe harbours, food, fresh water and the necessary coconut trees to provide ship-building materials. In this regard the ports of Western India and Ceylon were ideal.<sup>24</sup>

Ceylon had a long established trade with South India which operated through the traditional ports of the North-west and across the narrow Palk Straits which separate the island from South India. These already well-established connections with the emporium ports of South India formed the basis of Ceylon's articulation into the trade of the Roman Empire. It was during this period that Arab ships are first reported sailing to the Malabar Coast in South India and Ceylon. Roman trade died out towards the end of the second century AD with the decline of the Roman Empire. It was the Sassanid Persian Empire, which rose in the third century AD, which then dominated maritime trade in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. The Ethiopians in turn controlled the Red Sea route. The trade of Arabia was in decline between the fourth and sixth centuries, although the Arabs remained extensively involved in their role as sea-farers. It was at this time, in the fifth century, that Ceylon first became an entrepot port for the trade across the Indian Ocean (K.M.De Silva, 1981:43, Hourani, *ibid*:40).

After the rise of Islam in the seventh century and its rapid spread, a new dynamism was introduced to 'Muslim trade'. This term is a gloss covering the trading histories of a number of different peoples;

---

<sup>23</sup> The word monsoon is taken from the Arabic **mawsim** meaning a "fixed season" (Forbes, *ibid*:63, cites Yule and Burnell, 1986:577-8).

<sup>24</sup> The Arab ships of timbers sewn together with coir rope were light before the wind but unsuited to heavy weather. A division of trade developed with the Arabs sailing the routes through the western side of the Indian Ocean and heavier ships operating through the Bay of Bengal. The weather patterns of the area also influenced sailing patterns with the lighter Arab boats relying entirely on seasonal winds and avoiding the cyclones in the Bay of Bengal (C.R.De Silva, 1986:153). See also Hourani (*ibid*:87-122) for a full discussion of shipping and navigation in the Indian Ocean at this time.



Arabs, Yemenis, Persians, from the Middle East, and East Africans. After the twelfth century, it also included Muslim traders of Indian origin and later, Indonesians (Kiribamune, ibid:89-93). Islam was spread throughout the Indian Ocean and to South East Asia by the traders of the Southern Arabian Peninsula, peacefully and in conjunction with the development of a trading empire. The later conversion of North Indian Muslims under the Turks and the rise of the Moghul empire was distinct from this process.<sup>25</sup> The rise of Islam and the subsequent conquest of Persia, Syria and Egypt gave the Arabs control of all the important ports that stood between Europe and the East (*Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol I, 1951-52:305, cited Mohan, 1985:3).

... (A)s the Muslim character of the mercantile history of the Indian Ocean and of the silk road through Central Asia became more pronounced, new Muslim trading communities were generated at the focal points of international trade and local barter (Johns, 1975:39).

A significant factor in this new dynamism, which peaked in the ninth century, was that the 'Muslim trader' "could travel from Europe to China confident of the hospitality of his fellow Muslims at almost any sea-port at which he called" (Kiribamune, ibid:op cit).<sup>26</sup> This development of the Muslim community in the post-Islamic era also permitted an extension of the Arabs' traditional role as middlemen, and much local participation in ports of trade was eliminated.<sup>27</sup> The Sinhalese, for example, who had been sending regular missions to China between the first and eighth centuries, were now excluded. They resumed this trade in the tenth century (Kiribamune, ibid:95).

---

<sup>25</sup> This is reflected in the prevalence of the Hanafi rite versus the Shafi'i rite found in the South (cf ff12 above).

<sup>26</sup> Johns notes that later in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the Indian Ocean resembled an "Arabic-speaking Mediterranean" (ibid:38). The use of Arabic-Tamil - the writing of the Tamil language in the Arabic script, again reflects the importance of the Arab role in trade (Shukri, ibid:346). See also Mahroof (1992:16-19) on the use of this script by the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

<sup>27</sup> Shukri argues that along with "the growth and prosperity of the Arab trade, the Arab settlements too witnessed a corresponding growth" (ibid:339). Although referred to as Arab settlements they were in fact a conglomeration of "Persians, Arabs and Abyssinians, all Islamised (sic) and speaking the Arabic language" (ibid, op cit).

The structure of trade with its long haul and short haul components, made possible this gradual elimination of local competition. As C.R.De Silva argues however, this "dominance" was entirely dependent on the commercial success of numerous individual traders and not the widespread use of force (1986:148). Certain boats would ply the routes between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Coast for example, with others transferring goods from Ceylon to the Bay of Bengal and/or to the Far East. Still others would ply the more local routes between India and Ceylon on the Western and Eastern coasts. Both Bengal and Gujerat were the basis of extensive hinterland caravan trading routes (ibid:152) and other littoral ports also participated in local hinterland trade. Bengali trade of this period was almost entirely controlled by the Muslims, although some Chetti traders from the Coromandel Coast were engaged (ibid:151).

The expansion of Muslim trade in the Indian Ocean was checked by the rise of the Chola Empire in South India, in particular its sea-power. A Chola invasion of Ceylon in the tenth century and a subsequent period of rule during the tenth and eleventh centuries also hampered Muslim engagement in local trade. Prior to this, K.M.De Silva argues, the internal trade in Ceylon was largely controlled by Sinhalese merchants "who dominated the main market towns and were granted special charters by the Kings" (1981:44), while external trade was entirely in the hands of the Muslims (C.R.De Silva, ibid:152).<sup>28</sup>

This situation must take some qualification in my view, and should not be taken as representative of the situation prevailing throughout the whole island at the time.<sup>29</sup> I would view it as at most,

---

<sup>28</sup> These included Muslims from Arabia, Gujerat and also Mappila Muslims from Kerala (ibid, op cit).

<sup>29</sup> Historians rely in large part for their information about the island's early history, on the Sinhalese chronicles of Kingship; the *Rajavaliya*, the *Culavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*. They are obviously of somewhat limited value in terms of information about groups outside the areas controlled by the Sinhalese kingdoms. Throughout the entire period under discussion the island was divided into a number of regional polities with constantly shifting boundaries. There was the Hindu Jaffna kingdom in the North, the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom in the South and in between the two were the various Vanni chieftainships whose allegiances were shifting and at other times non-existent. From the fourteenth century on, the island's Southwest coast also supported other small and short-lived but none-the-less independent polities, who were constantly challenging older centres of power (Kulasuriya, 1976).



representative of the situation in the various inland capitals of the Sinhalese Kings, although it must be noted that these were often situated to take advantage of the major coastal ports of trade operative at various times.<sup>30</sup> The 'ubiquitous settlement' of the Muslims in the island suggests an early involvement in internal trade. "There is hardly a place without a crow or a Muslim" is a common Sinhalese adage (Ali, 1986b:148). Their engagement within the Kandyan Kingdom as carters, although at a much later period (Dewaraja, 1986) also points to a specific connection with internal trade. Certainly in the littoral areas of the Southwest where Muslims were settled prior to the drift to the Southwest of the Sinhalese Kingdom, (following the collapse of the Dry Zone civilizations), there is little evidence of Sinhalese merchants controlling internal trade, although their participation is not in dispute. The coastal regions of the Northern and Western sea-boards had, "from the early Anuradhapura period (137 BC - 718 AD) supported small but economically viable trade settlements" that had long attracted Sinhalese traders (K.M.De Silva, 1981:84). The extent to which these settlements of Arabs and other traders articulated with the Dry Zone capitals is nowhere explicit, but it is certain that the foreign trade (with China for example, see above) and the diplomatic missions (Bhuvanabhahu I's Mission to the Egyptian Court in 1238 (ibid:91)) of the early Sinhalese Kingdoms relied upon them.

The Dry Zone civilizations of this period were state run agrarian economies, characterized by extensive irrigation works and large scale agricultural production. The land tenure system was one in which service tenure was the norm and the King was the main source of land grants. There was also a sizable monastic land-owning class (Gunawardana, 1979). The **rajakariya** system of compulsory service to the King and a caste system centred on the King, ordered the internal relations of the Sinhalese state. State revenue was primarily

---

<sup>30</sup> The Sinhalese kings shifted their capitals in accordance with prevailing threats from the North or the vagaries of coastal trading centres on the island. Between the seventh and tenth centuries four Sinhalese rulers "left Anuradhapura and ruled from the north-eastern city of Polonnaruwa which could command the port of Trincomalee, facing the Bay of Bengal and the new centres of trade" (Kiribamune, ibid:93). In the earlier period trade was not fundamentally important to the island's economy as far as the kingdom was concerned (K.M.De Silva, ibid:42).

garnered in the agricultural field, and foreign trade was of little significance in purely economic terms. Foreign trade was predominantly in luxury items, (pearls from the fisheries of the North-West coast, gems from the South-West interior, ivory and spices), and the King acquired a proportion of the revenue generated in the form of customs duty. As K.M.De Silva points out however, the role of trade in this "agrarian economy of feudal society" should not be determined solely in economic terms, (ibid:42) and trade in some particular items was of symbolic import. Thus the role and position of the Muslim traders was one of some status.

During the Chola period Tamil pressure on the Northern capital of Anuradhapura again forced the Sinhalese to move the capital to Polonnaruwa, near the port of Trincomalee, and the important trade with Bengal. Subsequently further Tamil pressure on Polonnaruwa forced a shift to Kotte (in the South West), a move which also served to protect the island's cinnamon resources, a subject of increasing Tamil interest. At this time Indian merchant alliances displaced Sinhalese merchants, particularly in the trade routes of the Rajarata in the Northern Dry Zone, and these alliances continued to dominate until the restoration of Sinhalese power in the middle of the fifteenth century (ibid:48). While the Muslim traders of foreign origin had continued to trade throughout the Chola period, the collapse of the Chola Empire gave way to the emergence of Indian Muslim trading communities, which gained control of the wider Indian Ocean arena of trade.

Around the fifteenth century the island's agricultural production declined following the demise of the extensive Dry Zone irrigation works. These irrigation works, apart from the agricultural production they supported, had provided revenue in the form of water taxes (*diyadedum/diyadada*) to the state (ibid:70). As a result of this loss to the economy, trade rose progressively higher in ruler's priorities but did not overtake the state's traditional sources of revenue, and land taxes and revenue from grain still outstripped any export revenue. Cinnamon became increasingly important after the Crusades, but remained less important than elephants and areca nut. Areca nut, which was "produced in practically every highland plot in the wet zone" (Abeyasinghe, 1986:132) was at this time the Sinhalese peasant's main source of cash income and the exchange of areca nut for imported grain and cloth was a mainstay of small scale Muslim internal trade (Ali, 1986a:240, see also De Silva, ibid:175-6). Indian traders, both



Muslims and Hindus, exchanged imports for areca nuts with Muslim traders in the island's ports. Statements concerning the ubiquity of the Muslims clearly indicate that the trading network was extensive and their role in the economy was highly significant. They served the Sinhalese state by converting agricultural surplus into state income and they were the agents of transformation as far as the Sinhalese peasants were concerned. These Muslim traders, from a number of different Middle Eastern and Indian regions, had by the end of this period perhaps begun to develop some initial internal cohesion through their practice of a common religion and common engagement in trade. Certainly by this time they had gained a collective identity as traders, as far as the rest of the island was concerned. Their collective history was already a long and powerful one.

## **2.2 The position of Muslim traders within pre-colonial Ceylon.**

A consideration of the articulation of foreign traders into the social and ideological structures of pre-colonial Ceylon introduces the question of the interaction of egalitarian and hierarchical ideologies. It is evident that there was no clash between the two distinct ideologies at this period, as the egalitarian ideology of the Muslims, primarily expressed through their religious ritual, remained an internal matter and as small Muslim communities they were permitted to practice their religion, unheeded in the context of the hierarchical Sinhalese state. Hierarchy was the ideological language of the Ceylonese social and political order and the articulation of foreigners was in terms of this dominant ideology.

Following Tambiah's (1976) conception of the hierarchical 'Hindu-Buddhist' state (a Galactic Polity) and Kapferer's (1988) discussion of the hierarchical Sinhalese Buddhist state in which he argues (following Dumont, 1980), that diversity is the principle of unity, we have an understanding of the hierarchical state as one in which the apex (in this case the King) is both encompassing and determining of the whole. One specific, and in this case crucial, element of such a state is that the terms of its relation to small, foreign trading enclaves were hierarchical and encompassing, not exclusive. Thus the egalitarian ideology of the Muslims may have prevailed in their internal practices, but it remained encompassed by the hierarchical ideology of the Sinhalese state. These two opposed ideologies never came into direct conflict, and they should be regarded as operating in different ideological arenas. Indeed they co-existed to the extent

that Muslims were allotted land by the Kandyan Kings to build their own mosques within the kingdom (Dewaraja, *ibid*:221 cites Robert Knox).<sup>31</sup> The Sinhala state was at best a loose federation; a weak centre with an ideology of power, rather than a powerful centre. Within this ideology the Sinhala kings had to be tolerant of multiple polities both indigenous and foreign.

Foreign traders provided opportunities for engagement in regional and international trade, a trade that was primarily the province of the King. It appears that foreigners were unproblematically incorporated into the existing hierarchical, social and symbolic structure of the state.<sup>32</sup> In the Sinhalese state the King stood as divine head, and Sinhalese castes were determined through their relation to the King. Within this ideological system the position of foreigners was also determined in relation to the King and the position granted to foreign traders in ancient Ceylon appears to be one of considerable privilege. The King himself was understood to "own" all the Kingdom's economic resources (Senivaratne, 1978:4) including the pearls and gem mines and thus it follows that any exploitation of them, was dependent upon a clear relation between the trader and the King.<sup>33</sup> Miller (1976) argues that in the context of pre-colonial India the structure of trade depended upon credit, which in turn depended on the King.<sup>34</sup> C.R.De Silva also notes that "security of goods and fairness of treatment was a factor essential to attract merchants to

---

<sup>31</sup> Kotelawe (1986:204) notes that "one Muslim priest (was) supported out of the revenues of a Buddhist temple".

<sup>32</sup> Ali notes that Muslims were financed by the Kandyan treasury to trade on behalf of the King (*ibid*:236, cites John Davy [1821] 1969 reprint p93). John Davy was an Englishman who was held captive in the Kandyan kingdom for more than twenty years.

<sup>33</sup> In order to protect the King's interests in the gem districts, settlement was prohibited in the area and mining was carried out under royal supervision (K.M.De Silva, 1981:71).

<sup>34</sup> Miller argues that the term **maha-pillai** - great accountant, used to refer to Mappila Muslim traders in Kerala, reflects the structure of trade in India, which was carried out internally by native agents (see also Boxer, 1969:57, and Dale et al 1978:523, *ffl*, on this point). Another meaning attributed to Maha-pillai is "great child" meaning honoured (foreign) son-in-law, (Dale et al, *ibid*:op cit), and it is also used as "a descriptive honourific (for) foreigners who married into indigenous families" (Miller 1992:31). The term reflects first and foremost the nature of marriages contracted by these Muslims and by extension, their distinct ethnic status.



any port" (1986:149). It is clear that trade was always advantageous to the Sinhalese kings, but never critical in economic terms. (The situation shifted with the collapse of the Dry Zone and the colonial conquest of the littoral.) Nonetheless the traders (merchants or bankers) "were indispensable intermediaries in converting agricultural surplus into disposable state income" (Chaudhuri, 1985:11) and ruling elites were dependent on traders to create a market economy (ibid:16). In the history of Ceylon, Muslim traders appear to have been consistently welcome in the early Sinhalese kingdoms and particularly favoured in the Kandyan kingdom.

- The earliest information we have of the living conditions of the Muslims in the Sinhalese kingdoms refers to the early fifth century. In the Dry Zone capital Anuradhapura, an important commercial centre at the time, we find a reference to the many "stately and beautiful houses" of the Vaisya elders and Sabeian (Arab) merchants in the city (Legge, 1965:104)<sup>35</sup> According to the *Mahavamsa*, King Pandukabhaya had set aside an area of the city for the *Yonas*, a group whose trading status and foreign origins are readily acknowledged, but whose country of origin is in dispute. K.M.De Silva states that they are Yavanas, Greeks who had been in the region from early times (1981:43), but Kiribamune (1986:90) argues that it was the presence of Arab traders in the city that was the basis of this account. There were also Persian and indigenous Tamil merchants domiciled in the capital at this time. The policy of Asian rulers allowing "a limited form of extra-territoriality" was a common and long-standing practice (Boxer, ibid:48).<sup>36</sup>

The impression created is that the position of foreign merchants in the Sinhalese capitals was one of privilege, but without confirmatory evidence we may only assume at this point that they were articulated into the symbolic hierarchy. There are much later references, during the Kandyan period, to the inclusion of Muslims in the Kandy Perahera, a ritual of the Sinhalese Kingship which was revived in the eighteenth century by Kirti Sri Rajasinha. This perahera was a ceremonial procession of the Buddha's tooth relic, itself an icon of

---

<sup>35</sup> Here the term Arab is again being used as a gloss, Mohan identifies the Sabeans as from Yemen (cf ff20).

<sup>36</sup> There were Both Indian and Javanese mercantile communities at Malacca, Muslims in Malabar, and Persians and Arabs in China to cite a few (ibid, op cit).

the Kingship, in which the entire symbolic order of the Kingdom was revealed and re-asserted. At this time the carrier of the Pearl Umbrella (**mutukuda**), an insignia of the King, was a Muslim (Senivaratne, *ibid*:77).<sup>37</sup>

The data available concerning the position of Muslims in the early kingdoms is meagre and arguments are therefore necessarily speculative (aside from the Kandyan kingdom in the later period). It seems clear, however, that for the most part Muslims were not subject to the requirements of **rajakariya** and that as a predominantly trading and therefore non land-holding class they were freed from the requirements of service tenure.<sup>38</sup> Their "service", apart from the

---

<sup>37</sup> Fa Hien, a Chinese monk who visited the island in 411AD, noted that one particular type of pearl found in Ceylon - the **mani** - was a symbol of the Buddha and his law, and further that the King required three of every ten pearls collected (Legge, *ibid*:101). The symbolic value of the pearl umbrella then in a ritual of the Buddhist Kingship is clear, as is also the position of the Muslims in the symbolic order. However we should not overlook the symbolic value of pearls for the Muslims. It would appear that the Arabs came to Ceylon for its pearls in ancient times and that Muslims in particular were specifically engaged in their trade over many centuries. Ali states that

culturally and historically Muslims have an ancient connection with pearl fishing. According to the Qur'an "He it is who has made the sea subservient that you may eat fresh fish from it, and bring forth from it ornaments which you wear" Al Qur'an, 16:14, Al-Nahl (1986a:239).

Some informants believe that there was an Arab name for Ceylon which meant "the island of pearls" and claim that pearls have traditionally been revered as the "semen of Allah". If this tradition was also shared by the Muslims of the eighteenth century who were trading in Ceylon, then the inclusion of the Muslims as carriers of the **mutukuda** in the rituals of the Buddhist Kingship had, quite possibly, a specifically **religious** value of its own. Marco Polo states that the "Maabar" (Coromandel Coast) and Ceylon were the major producers of the pearls and gems to be found in the world (*ibid*:273). The pearl fishing in the Gulf of Mannar was held to be second only to that of Bahrain (C.R.De Silva, 1978:15) and customarily engaged as many as 50-60,000 divers and merchants (*ibid*:24). Bahrain was originally the pearl centre for the European trade routes. As late as Leonard Woolf's time in Ceylon (1904-1911) the greater part of the pearl diving force (of 20,000 - 30,000) engaged in the annual pearl fisheries originated there (Woolf, 1961:89-98). See also Ali (*ibid*:237-240) for later accounts of Muslims and the pearl industry.

<sup>38</sup> "The possession of lands to which special privileges and duties were attached was the material foundation for the hierarchy of castes" (Yalman, *ibid*:17).



ceremonial duties referred to above, would have largely consisted of a tax on their trade which was a source of revenue to the crown or local authority. To the extent that they stood "outside", or more accurately in the interstices of the normal land-tied service tenure system, they could be argued to have had considerable entrepreneurial advantage. They were a community who were able to fully exploit the later development of capitalist enterprise in the island.<sup>39</sup>

As stated above there has been a tendency to read the history of the Muslims through the histories of the various Sinhalese kingdoms. Although they were clearly related, there is evidence to suggest that the Muslim communities existed both in the context of, and simultaneously outside, these arenas of Sinhalese power. Thus the degree of their articulation with the hierarchical state was never entirely fixed. At this point I turn to a discussion of their articulation with the Kandyan kingdom. This was the latest and last point of resistance to the colonial powers, an area which provided a refuge for threatened coastal Muslims, a period for which we have greater historical data (Dewaraja, 1986), and finally an arena in which Muslim agency became critical to the exercise of Sinhalese economic and political power. This was a new and significant chapter in Muslim history on the island.

Dewaraja (ibid) has argued that the Muslims were "structurally assimilated" into the Kandyan Kingdom. She defines this as a process of full social integration in which the Muslims in the kingdom maintained their identity intact, largely through their religious practices. This differs from the process of "cultural assimilation" in which an ethnic minority acquires "the values, beliefs, language and behaviour of the dominant group" (ibid:215). The structural assimilation of the Muslims was achieved through their voluntary participation in the **badda** system. Everyone in the kingdom lived on agriculture and with the exception of the highest caste (**govikula**),

---

<sup>39</sup> The areas where Muslims constitute the greatest percentages of the population are the Eastern and North Central Provinces, where the majority of the Muslims are agriculturalists and tied to the land. However those members of the community who were always connected to trade, (those of the South-west, Kandy and the coastal ports) were in a prime position to exploit capitalist opportunity in the British period. Their lack of ties to the land is reflected in their greater economic success. See also Roberts (1982:85) on Muslim exploitation of the structural niches created in Sinhalese social organization.

practised some other craft and had the right to supply that labour to the state. All land nominally belonged to the King and in return for use of the land, 'tenants' rendered services to the state. The **badda** system was a centralized, caste based system of mobilizing the resources of the Kingdom for public service. The Muslims and the fisher caste formed the **madige badda** (ibid:216). They were obliged to trade for the king and provide oxen for the transport of grain and other produce from the king's lands to the royal granaries.

Initially Muslim traders were without lands to cultivate, but as time went by there is evidence that some of them worked as share-croppers on **vihara** (Buddhist temple) lands and many others married local women (who would have brought lands with them).<sup>40</sup> Their assigned caste position was a very high one in the Sinhalese caste hierarchy. The **govikula** was the highest caste and one to which more than a half of the population belonged. Within this caste the highest sub-caste was the **mudaliperuva** (high bureaucrats) and the Muslims were placed immediately below this. Despite this degree of integration into the caste system, their explicit role in the symbolic order and their marriages to local women, the Muslims remained, and were regarded as, culturally distinct.<sup>41</sup> <sup>42</sup> Further they continued to practice their

---

<sup>40</sup> **Binna** marriages to Kandyan Sinhalese women indicated matrilineal residence. Yalman recounts a myth found in Batticaloa of seven Moors who came with seven Hindu Tamils from South India to fight as mercenaries against the Jaffna Tamils who controlled the East coast at the time. They were victorious and were asked whether they would like land or women. "The Moors knew that the Hindu Tamils were matrilineal, so they asked for the women, for in getting the women they also got land which descended in the maternal line" (Yalman, ibid:282-83).

<sup>41</sup> After centuries of close habitation the Muslims still keep their women in purdah in the Kandyan kingdom despite the fact that purdah was unknown amongst the Sinhalese (Dewaraja, ibid:228). It is however a religious practice which **signs** them as distinct.

<sup>42</sup> One myth from the research area refers to a group of Muslim Unani physicians in the Kandyan kingdom who cured the King's daughter and were granted wives. They were instructed by the King that at a public gathering the next day, they should each run and touch the hand of a young Sinhalese woman that they would like to marry. After this the parents came and complained to the King that their daughters had been **polluted** by this contact and the King had the parents agree to allow their daughters to marry the Muslims, since they would no longer find Sinhalese husbands (my emphasis). This would suggest that the Muslims were regarded as entirely 'other' given the relatively lax marital arrangements prevailing **within** the Kandyan Sinhalese community at the time (Yalman, ibid:168). See also Kotelawe (ibid:174-5), Dewaraja (ibid:212-13) for versions of this myth.



egalitarian ideology even while functioning from a structurally assimilated position in the Sinhalese caste system.<sup>43</sup> The caste system in Ceylon had no religious sanction and Dewaraja interprets it in Weberian terms as a "vocational ethic" (ibid:222). In this instance the "special skills" of the Muslims were trade and transport and in these areas they were functionally able to serve society. They were also readily assimilated as physicians, another position which did not exist in the Kandyan feudal hierarchy.

Their ready acceptance as a foreign trading group and their subsequent articulation into the Kingdom could perhaps be interpreted in the light of the much later arrival and assimilation of the Karava, Salagama and Durava (KSD) castes from South India in successive waves of immigration from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Obeyesekere, 1984:308, K.M.De Silva, 1981:91). I note that at that time the principal imports of the island were cloth and dried fish, and the Salagama and Karava were non-agriculturalist, weavers and fishermen. The Karava and Salagama came from the West coast of India and many have become Sinhalese Buddhists with a proportion of the Karava becoming Catholics.<sup>44</sup> The Salagama weavers subsequently adopted cinnamon peeling as a caste occupation, providing an obligatory supply to the King in exchange for land-holdings and selling any excess they had. By the sixteenth century the entire external cinnamon trade of Ceylon had become a Malabar monopoly (C.R.De Silva, 1986:154). In the case of the KSD castes, who were clearly entrepreneurial, they were initially articulated into the Kingdom and the Sinhalese caste system and with their later adoption of Buddhism their structural assimilation was complete.<sup>45</sup> By contrast the Muslims, although welcome in the inland kingdom and articulated

---

<sup>43</sup> The egalitarian ideology of the Muslims in contrast to the hierarchical values of the Sinhalese is also stressed in the Akurana (Kandy) area, where the same myth (ff42 above) is used by informants to explain the introduction of hierarchy into the Muslim community through the marriages of Muslim men to Sinhalese women of different castes (Rob Jones, p.c.).

<sup>44</sup> The latter as a result of the Catholic Portuguese control of the littoral where, as a fishing population, the Karava had settled.

<sup>45</sup> K.M.De Silva notes that there remains some "disparity in the extent to which segments of each of these castes have been assimilated within the social system", a fact which suggests that the "length of their contact with Sinhalese society has varied. The process of assimilation has been facilitated by their adoption of the culture of the region to which they had migrated" (1981:91).

into the hierarchy in a position of considerable status, nonetheless remained an encompassed yet entirely distinct, religious and largely egalitarian group.

### 2.3 The Portuguese Incursion 1505 - 1658.

The arrival of the Portuguese in the region in 1498, flushed with their success in the Iberian Wars, heralded a radical disjuncture in the structure of Indian Ocean trade. In contrast to the prevailing 'Islamic dominance' of trade at this point, an aggregation of individuals and groups of merchants from India and several Middle Eastern countries, whose commercial networks profited to a limited extent through adherence to a common faith, the Portuguese (and later Dutch and English) colonial intervention operated through a single trading organization "directed from a central point and backed by armed power" (C.R.De Silva, 1986:148, see also Chaudhuri, *ibid*:10).<sup>46</sup>

The explicit aim of the Portuguese was to control the spice trade, the cinnamon of Ceylon and the pepper of India's Malabar coast. Pepper, or "Black gold" (Miller, 1976:41) remained the basic commodity of Portuguese Indian trade as late as 1611 (Boxer, *ibid*:60), a trade which from Kerala to the Red Sea was in the hands of the Arabs (Indrapala, *ibid*:121). The clear commercial objective of the Portuguese was to break the trade routes through the Red Sea

and prevent any more spices from passing to the hands of the Sultan (of Turkey) and persuade all the people of India to put aside the fantasy that they can ever again trade with any but ourselves (...instructions issued to Francisco de Almeida, first Portuguese Vice-roy of India, cited C.R.De Silva, *ibid*:156-7).<sup>47</sup>

Their initial interests were opposed however by the incumbent traders and between 1507 and 1509 the combined fleets of the Muslim Zamorin of Calicut (on the West coast of India) and the Sultan of Egypt were

---

<sup>46</sup> These trading organizations were the **Estado da India** of the Portuguese, the **Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie** (V.O.C.) of the Dutch and the **British East India Company**.

<sup>47</sup> Boxer argues that following the build-up of military power during the Iberian wars the Portuguese and Spaniards were forced to deploy this power elsewhere. A Bull of Pope Alexander VI (The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas), divided the undiscovered world between the crowns of Portugal and Castile (*ibid*:231), along a line drawn North and South 370 miles from the coast of Europe (Collis 1946:16). This expansion then, following the wars, which themselves had a religious character, was given a specifically religious (as well as economic) legitimacy. Portugal's sea-borne empire in Asia was "a military and maritime enterprise cast in an ecclesiastical mould" (Boxer, *ibid*:75).



engaged in battles with the Portuguese and posed "a serious threat .. to their power in the Indian Ocean" (Abeyasinghe, *ibid*:134). Ultimate Portuguese success against the Muslim traders and the subsequent decline in Muslim trade must be attributed to Portugal's far superior naval strength, "the use of force based on superior technology" (C.R.De Silva, *ibid*:160) and a willingness to exploit any point of weakness, a factor which allowed them to wield "an influence out of proportion to their real strength" (K.M.De Silva, 1981:100). Muslims responded to Portuguese attacks "with a mixture of armed force and accommodation until a fragile balance of power was reached by the mid sixteenth century" (C.R.De Silva, *ibid*:147).

What were once a series of free ports under the control of the local rulers were now the subject of consistent colonial attempts (not always successful) to secure exclusive trading monopolies. The Portuguese introduced a system of **cartazes** - or bills of permission to trade (Boxer, *ibid*:48, C.R.De Silva, *ibid*:159), which were often avoided by Muslims traders, particularly on the "piratical" Kerala coast.<sup>48</sup> As the Portuguese established control over particular ports in the region, other ports where traders sought to avoid these invasive measures of curtailment were opened up.<sup>49</sup> In a similar fashion the Portuguese blockade of the Red Sea shifted the trade between Turkey and Europe to the ports of the Persian Gulf. The initial aim of the Portuguese was to establish control of commerce through the use of naval power rather than direct territorial control. They relied on a line of forts, from Ormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, to Malacca which controlled the Straits and the route to China, forts specifically located in order to control the trade routes with the use of maritime power. Goa, on India's Western coast, became the principal fort and the seat of the Viceroy of the Indies, and was regarded as both the mercantile and ecclesiastical centre of Portuguese activity in the region (Collis, *ibid*:16-23).

---

<sup>48</sup> Piracy was common on the west coasts of India and Ceylon (Mukundan, 1979:71) prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, and during their period of rule (See also Boxer, *ibid*:58, C.R.De Silva, *ibid*:157-8).

<sup>49</sup> The Portuguese recognized however that the Muslims performed a vital service and initially sought simply to prevent them from participation in the spice trade, (pepper in Malabar and cinnamon in Ceylon) (Abeyasinghe, *ibid*:132).

The Portuguese first arrived on the coast of Ceylon by accident in 1505 (Schreuder, 1946[1762]:6) and were deceived by the Moors, who had a local prince impersonate the King of Kotte and then led them on a roundabout journey through the jungle to his "court". The "king" provided them with a bogus permission to trade and they established a fortified warehouse near Colombo on the West coast (Mohan, 1985:13). The Moors, who were largely in control of the island's external trade, raised popular sympathy against this move and the first fortified warehouse was later burnt down. The Portuguese returned to the island in 1517, better prepared, and by 1518 had completed a fort in Colombo. However the Sinhalese king of nearby Kotte, in conjunction with the Moors and the Zamorin of Calicut harassed it constantly, until in 1524 the Portuguese decided to demolish it (Abeyasinghe, *ibid*:134).

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese the polity of Ceylon was in a fragmented state, with a number of separate kingdoms.<sup>50</sup> There was a Tamil Hindu kingdom in Jaffna in the North, and between this kingdom and the South were the various Vanni chieftainships, areas under independent chiefly control. In the South, as a result of King Vijayabahu being deposed in 1521, the kingdom had been divided among three of his sons (C.R.De Silva, 1978:17). There were therefore three Sinhalese kingdoms at Raigama, Kotte and Sitawaka. The Kotte economy of the early sixteenth century was basically one of subsistence agriculture with a limited commerce in valuable commodities (cinnamon, gems, pearls, elephants, and areca nut) which were traded through the West and South-west ports of Puttalam, Kalpitiya, Salavata (Chilaw), Kammala, Negombo, Colombo, Kalutara, Beruwela, Galle and Weligama, all largely in the hands of Muslim traders.<sup>51</sup> The Portuguese took advantage of the political fragmentation in the island and in particular sought to exploit the conflicts arising through the wars of the Kotte succession.<sup>52</sup> The King of Kotte,

---

<sup>50</sup> This fragmentation had been going on for some time. See Kulasuriya (*ibid*:136-155) for a full discussion.

<sup>51</sup> Coastal populations of Muslims "whose interests coincided with those of local rulers" (Dewaraja, *ibid*:211). Similar coastal Muslim populations were found in Gujerat, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal (*ibid*, *op cit*).

<sup>52</sup> They applied this policy in India also. By exploiting "an age-old enmity", between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Raja of Cochin, they were able to secure "their first firm foothold in India" and subsequently to get a strong hold on the Malabar Pepper trade"



(Dharma Parakramabahu IX) became a Portuguese satellite, in order to buttress his own power against a threatened take-over of his Kingdom by his brother Mayadunne in the adjacent kingdom of Sitawaka. Mayadunne and a third brother, the ruler of Raigama, sided with the Moors and Mayadunne made an ally of the Zamorin of Calicut who sent troops in support. The Portuguese won this conflict and demanded that Mayadunne "execute the leaders of the Malabari forces who had come to the island to assist him and send (them) their severed heads" (K.M.De Silva, 1981:103). Mayadunne complied, and this act of betrayal ended the long-standing Sitawaka-Calicut alliance (1527-1539) (C.R.De Silva, 1978:19-20). As a result of the Kotte King's reliance on the Portuguese and their increasing role in the defence of the kingdom he was forced to expel the Muslims from Colombo in 1526. They moved to Sitawaka and "probably relocated themselves in other port-towns on the Western coast such as Beruwela (and) Alutgama" (Abeyasinghe, ibid:135).

After 1565 "most, if not all the cinnamon lands of the littoral were under the control of Sitawaka", and were a key source of revenue to the Sitawaka kings (K.M.De Silva, ibid:111). This cinnamon which was exported from Ceylon to the Malabar remained a monopoly of the Mapillas of Malabar (C.R.De Silva, 1986:154) but Portuguese incursions decimated the Arab role in its transport. The Portuguese, with the exception of the cinnamon trade, left most of the external trade (areca exported in exchange for cloth, rice and dried fish) in the hands of the Muslims and also found that they had to use some of them to crew their boats (Abeyasinghe, ibid:132). Battles over the control of trade continued between the Portuguese and the Ceylonese. In 1579 King Rajasinghe (of Sitawaka) laid siege to Portuguese held Colombo, and did so again in 1587 and 1588. The response of the Moors to Portuguese tactics was determined by the prevailing circumstances. Their policy was a mixture of conflict and accommodation which sometimes led to their changing sides. Thus some of the Moors who had fought against the Portuguese in 1517, had by 1586 transferred their allegiance and fought with the Portuguese against Rajasinghe (C.R.De Silva, 1986:147).

In 1593 Sitawaka fell to the Portuguese and the Muslims were again forced to flee. Many retreated to Kandy, the only remaining sovereign

---

(Boxer, ibid:50). In the case of Kotte, it was the cinnamon trade that they were after.

kingdom. By 1594 Portuguese policy had altered to one of direct conquest and they made several attempts to subdue the Kandyan Kingdom. During this period the Kandyan kingdom served as a refuge to the Muslims, and they in turn supplied access to "men, munitions and provisions from abroad" (K.M.De Silva, 1977:15 ff1), through the ports of the Eastern coast which remained under Kandyan control. In 1617 the Portuguese signed a treaty with the Kandyan king and sought to have the Moors expelled, but in this they were unsuccessful.

The Portuguese came as both religious adversaries and trading rivals, and the construction of a "Muslim" identity began in earnest with their arrival. Portuguese opposition to the Moors on religious grounds was a product of their own experience (and more particularly that of Spain) in the Iberian wars, and in part due to their own religious ambitions. They applied the term **Moors**, indiscriminately to all Muslims, irrespective of origin. It was adopted by the Moors and I suggest that its application and adoption are indicative of the earliest construction of a unifying **local** Muslim identity. An identity which went deeper than the prevailing religious ideology that Muslims as co-religionists were all members of the one Islamic community - **ummah**. This common religious identity had undoubtedly been of some instrumental value to traders in the region in providing a certain guarantee of hospitality at foreign ports but they remained **individuals**, and strong trading competitors.<sup>53</sup> The arrival of the Portuguese and their opposition to the Moors *en masse* (as traders and religious enemies), was the basis of the first construction of a common identity among the Moors who found a much more common interest in seeking to avoid Portuguese attempts to control their trade.

The Portuguese were ruthless adversaries, and informants in the research area cite an early attack launched in Colombo, specifically against the Moor trading community. The Portuguese blockaded both ends of Old Moor Street, the centre of trading activity in the town, and massacred everybody in the middle. In 1643 a Portuguese Captain, Antonio de Almaral de Menezes, employed in the Galle and Matara area in the Southern Province, believed that the Muslims were in league with the Dutch, and he surrounded the bazaar area in Matara where the majority of Muslims resided, and "put to the sword some 200 to 300

---

<sup>53</sup> In Ceylon for example, there is a reference to a battle for control of the pearling in the Gulf of Mannar between two local Muslim chieftains (C.R.De Silva, 1978:17).



adult males and youths and sent the women and younger children to Colombo as slaves" (Goonewardena, 1986:191). These accounts of the massacres are still remembered with some venom by the community today.<sup>54</sup> There are also accounts of the Portuguese setting fire to boats of Muslims traders and pilgrims en route to Mecca.<sup>55</sup>

The establishment of a common identity in opposition to the Portuguese was by no means total however, and in pursuit of trading opportunities, some Muslims threw in their lot with the Portuguese sooner than others. A further source of the development of cohesion among the Moors must be attributed to the opposition of the Portuguese to the Muslims on religious grounds. To the Portuguese the Moors were "enemies of the name of Christ" (Doc.Rem.Vol.VIII (Lisboa 1977) p.56, cited Abeyasinghe, *ibid*:136) and "enemies of the human race" (Querios, 1930, pp.530, 1128, 1143, cited *ibid*:142 ff1).

The Portuguese were followed by a number of missionaries, of whom the most influential was undoubtedly St Francis Xavier, now entombed in the Bom Jesus Church in Goa.<sup>56</sup> They actively sought to proselytize their Catholicism and successfully converted large numbers among the predominantly coastal Parava, Karava and Mukkuver castes (C.R.de Silva, *ibid*:20). They had a "ruthless policy of proselytisation and

---

<sup>54</sup> A.C. Sheik Mohammed Ajwad (of Matara) remembers that as a child when he was taken on picnics by his parents, they used to halt their cart on the way to Meddawatte near the East end of town. There they recited a Fatiha and invoked Allah's blessings on those who were executed by the Portuguese on the banks of the Niwala Ganga (*ibid*, 1970:116).

<sup>55</sup> Forbes (1981:79) has a reference to the Portuguese burning alive a shipload of Muslims in a Maldivian **gundras** (barque) in 1503 (cites G.Correa quoted in Pyrard Vol II, p473-4). Another source states, "They butchered crews of captured Muslim dhows, slinging some from the yard-arm for target practice, cutting off the hands and feet of others and sending a boat-load of bits to the local ruler, telling him to use them for a curry" (Plumb, 1969:xxiii). Similar tactics were also employed by the Muslims and C.R. De Silva, (1978:19) cites an incident in a Portuguese-Muslim battle over the Ceylon pearl fishery at Mannar when the Kunjali fleet of the Samudri (Zamorin) of Calicut set fire to two Portuguese boats.

<sup>56</sup> Goa in the mid seventeenth century was the supreme power in the region and it remained a Portuguese colony until 1975. The right arm of St Francis Xavier was sent to the Vatican in 1614 (Collis, *ibid*:38). This relic is now displayed for worship on a side altar of the Jesu Church, the main Jesuit church, in Rome. At the side of the altar is a collection box for donations to the missions in South Asia.

destruction of Asian religions and religious establishments" (Kotelawele, *ibid*:167).<sup>57</sup> To further this aim they introduced the Inquisition to Goa in 1560 (Collis, *ibid*:45) where it remained operative for more than fifty years.

Portuguese enterprise in the region was both mercantile and religious and following their arrival, religion was shifted into determining relation in a new way. From the Muslim perspective this meant that their religious identity (above and beyond their trading occupation) became the basis for a powerful colonial opposition. Prior to this their religious identity (and their trading occupation) had been the basis for their incorporation into the encompassing Sinhalese hierarchical (religious and political) system. The Buddhist religion at the apex of the system had embraced and encompassed within it all alternative religious communities. The ideological constitution of the *civitas dei* of the Catholic church tolerated no alternative religious practice within its borders, although it is clear that in practice a certain tolerance and accommodation were soon forthcoming.<sup>58</sup> Owing to the fact that the Muslims were largely an encompassed minority and rarely the object of scholarship this new determination of religion is to be ascertained with reference to the clash between the Portuguese and the local kingships. With the arrival of the Portuguese in the region the *civitas dei* of the Catholic Church stood in opposition to the *galactic polity* of the Buddhist and Hindu kingships.

Prior to Portuguese arrival the language of the polity in which the Moors were included was religious, that of the Sinhalese hierarchical and encompassing state. This was a state which permitted them, unproblematically, to follow their own religious persuasion. Conversely there is no suggestion of any Muslim - Buddhist conflict at this time, and further there are no accounts of specifically religious conflicts between Moors and Hindus in the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna or the South Indian Hindu states. In those small principalities ruled by Muslims in South India and the areas of

---

<sup>57</sup> The religious and mercantile ambitions of the Portuguese are evident in the title of a book written by Fernao De Queyroz, *The Spiritual and Temporal Conquest of the Island of Ceylon*.

<sup>58</sup> See Kapferer (1988) for a comparative analysis of hierarchical and egalitarian ideologies. In particular he discusses the potential intolerance of egalitarianism.





Muslim chieftainships in Ceylon there are no accounts of forced conversions to Islam among the local populations.<sup>59</sup> The Portuguese were determined to convert Asia and in 1567 a vice-regal decree was promulgated "which enacted inter alia - that all heathen temples in Portuguese territory should be abolished" (Boxer *ibid*:68). In 1588 they destroyed the great Vishnu temple at Dondra on the South coast and they also sacked the Vibhisana temple in Kotte which was likely the guardian of the Sinhalese capital and the "sovereignty of the Sinhala kings" (Obeyesekere *ibid*:290). Also during this period, many Muslim mosques were destroyed and this religious persecution is often cited as a factor inducing Muslim communities to leave their coastal homes and seek refuge elsewhere in the island.<sup>60</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese there were numerous battles, both in the island and the wider region between Hindu and Buddhist kings seeking to extend their region of dominance. It must be noted however that although this pattern of "over-rule and conversion" was very strong in the actual history of South-east Asian politics, the conversion was "co-extensive with the process of political expansion by monarchs or of political unification, which is more **an embracing of diversity around a centre than a centralization of power itself**" (Tambiah, 1976:46, my emphasis). Political and religious dominance were always inextricably linked and within the polity, religious diversity tolerated. The kings in these hierarchical states always had the potential, at the ideological level, to extend their arena of religious and political dominance and become a world ruler. In the Indic states this was encapsulated in the idea of a **cakkavatti**, a "king of kings" or universal emperor. In the Buddhist conception (Sinhalese, Burmese and Thai), this was a **boddhisattva** or Buddha to be.

---

<sup>59</sup> Quieros (Queyroz) specifically states that the Muslims of Ceylon did not attempt conversion (1930:193, cited Abeyasinghe *ibid*:133).

<sup>60</sup> These historical themes may be observed in the research area also. See Appendix A for an account of the Horagoda community who settled there after fleeing Portuguese persecution in Dondra and in Chapter Five, the Portuguese destruction of the Koledande Mosque.

The Boddhisattva was believed to be a Buddhist king who possessed the "seven gems", one of which was the white elephant.<sup>61</sup> These ideas of the religious polity were widespread throughout the region and invasions of one kingdom by another were often organized with the explicit purpose of capturing either the white elephant or another of the Buddha's relics. As Tambiah points out, the Buddha's relics were repositories of the Buddha's "power" of conquest.

His relics became indissolubly associated with Kingship and Buddhist politics, acting as part of the royal regalia and serving as objects of the royal cult and as symbols of legitimate kingship (ibid:43-44).<sup>62</sup>

Thus the Buddhist king of Burma had hoped to capture the king of Siam's white elephant by invading Siam and the Malayan, Chandrabanu's invasion of Ceylon (cf above) was mounted in order to possess the Buddha's tooth.<sup>63</sup> This was the supreme Buddhist relic and it was believed that its possessor was on the threshold of final enlightenment. When possession was not possible, deference was called for and the Buddhist king of Pagan had sent a brush made of his own hair and his queen's to the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) in Kandy (Collis, ibid:162).

Buddhist kings dreamt that they might be a Boddhisattva, the divine instruments of saving the world. This was in sharp conflict with the Portuguese intentions and Xavier,

the embodiment of Catholic Portugal, dreamt of rescuing Asia from certain damnation and bringing it under the jurisdiction of St Peter's thereby unifying the world under one spiritual government (Collis, ibid:160).

---

<sup>61</sup> The Buddha had previously been a white elephant. See Collis (ibid:156-158) for details of the seven gems.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Battuta who visited Raigama in the fourteenth century reports that a minister of distant Kerala extraction named Alagakkonara was making a bid for independence in what had been a petty principality. He possessed the white elephant, "the emblem of supreme power (...and...) had set himself up as an independent ruler" (Kulasuriya, ibid:144). By the end of his period of office his sphere of influence ranged from Raigama "off the South-west coast, to Samanalakanda in the central hills and from Kalaniya to Matara on the south-western coast" (ibid:loc cit).

<sup>63</sup> Other missions to acquire the *dalada* (Buddha's tooth) were sent by the Chinese emperor in 1405, and by Kublai Khan in 1284 (De Silva, 1981:86-87).



Despite the absolute opposition in these two world views, one hierarchical and encompassing and the other oppositional and intolerant of internal difference, they both had ideologies of the demonic and attributed occult values to objects. An account of the battle for the Buddha's tooth relic in Jaffna is instructive for it reveals that Portuguese determination to possess the relic was not based simply on the idea that this relic, as an icon of the Kingship, or symbol of its legitimation, must be captured in order to destabilise a royal claimant's basis to rule, as might be the immediate supposition. Rather this (and presumably other), icon(s) were perceived as redolent with the power of evil in and of themselves. These relics were the objective power of the anti-Christ and had to be destroyed. The tooth in particular was regarded as "the most devilish relic in all heathendom" (Collis, ibid:162). At the time the Buddha's tooth was temporarily in Jaffna and the Portuguese fought a fierce battle under the standard "of the five wounds of Christ" and captured it (Collis, ibid:164).<sup>64</sup> Despite "a very handsome offer" for the tooth by the king of Burma "it was publicly pounded to smithereens with a mortar and pestle by the Archbishop of Goa" (Collis, ibid:165), (Boxer, ibid:75-6).<sup>65</sup>

As I have explained above, the conception of the boddhisattva had a wide regional influence, in which the kings of the Buddhist states viewed possession of the Buddha's relics as both temporarily empowering and divinely legitimating evidence of the power of their kingship. It is reasonable to assume that the Portuguese were well aware of this logic and perceived themselves as deeply engaged in a clash of two world views. Through the ideology of the galactic polity common in the East and that of the *civitas dei* of the Catholic, Portuguese and Spanish forces, both sought to rule the world.

---

<sup>64</sup> Roberts (1989) interprets the portrayal of the Portuguese, in Sinhalese folk-tales, as "**eaters of stone and drinkers of blood**", as acts of "nationalist opposition" (ibid:69). Following Kapferer (1983) he argues that such portrayals act to render the Portuguese "like demons, (...) both disordering and comic, (...and...) ultimately controllable" (loc cit). I suggest that Portuguese representations of themselves, as seen in this instance where they fought under the standard of the **five wounds of Christ**, inadvertently helped to reinforce Sinhalese cultural logic.

<sup>65</sup> There is still a Buddha's tooth relic in the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy.



In this context, the Muslims were clearly both trading and religious enemies of the Portuguese. Previously their religious difference was tolerated by the encompassing Sinhalese state, whereas the Portuguese tolerated no difference at all. Portuguese antipathy to the Moors in Ceylon however, was tempered by personal economic interest. The Moors maintained total control of the trade in areca nut and as virtually every Portuguese in the island owned land which produced areca nut, they had a vested interest in the continuation of this trade. As a result of this, the orders sent from Goa by the officers of the Portuguese crown, to expel the Moors from Ceylon, were applied to the Coast Moors who were permitted to reside in Colombo "from monsoon to monsoon" and the Ceylon Moors were permitted to remain (Abeyasinghe, ibid:137).

#### 2.4 Dutch Repression 1658-1796

The V.O.C. was established in 1602 with extensive state support and monopolist privilege and it deliberately set out to challenge the Portuguese control of the spice trade in the East. It was billed as a rationalist economic enterprise with religion as a secondary factor, and when relevant at all, specifically directed against the Roman Catholic influence of the Portuguese. Portuguese conversion of local fishing populations had been partly responsible for their economic success (C.R.de Silva, 1978:14). Between 1638 and 1658 the Dutch conquered all Portuguese settlements in coastal Ceylon while the Kandyan kingdom remained sovereign.<sup>66</sup>

The Dutch in Ceylon also stood in opposition to the Moors on economic grounds and were far more determined than the Portuguese to remove them from any participation in trade at all. Dutch policy was explicitly geared to the removal of the Moors ("a canker in the Hon:Company's profits" Kotelawele, ibid:180), from all areas of economic activity in the island. They employed both legislation and religious persecution towards the attainment of that end.

Only agriculture and navigation must be left open to them as occupations, and they are prohibited from engaging in all other trade within the country, either directly or indirectly (...) The Dessave (...[provincial administrator]...) must not permit the Moors to perform any religious rites nor tolerate

---

<sup>66</sup> The first Dutch Governor of the island dates from 1640 but the Portuguese did not leave entirely until 1658.

their priests either within or outside the Gravets (Mahroof,1990b:360,ff32).<sup>67</sup>

While the Portuguese had in the main relied on superior sea-power and to a lesser extent on religious conversion to control their territory, the Dutch sought extensive control of the island's littoral. They took over all the Portuguese forts and established a new fort at Matara on the South coast and an interior fort at Embilipitiya on the Southern border of the Kandyan kingdom. In line with their policy of total control of the littoral and all trading activity, the Dutch employed a specific policy of social management with their creation of a Burgher community through the marriages of Dutch men and local women.<sup>68</sup> This community was intended to increase their economic hold on the island through an increase in the size of their population. Those areas of commercial activity which the company itself could not manage were to be passed to the Burghers, and failing them to local Christians. In order to oust the Muslims from trade with the Kandyan kingdom preferential tariffs were introduced,

discriminating in favour of Burghers and Sinhalese Christians, much to the disadvantage of Muslim traders (Dewaraja,ibid:213, cites memoir of Ryckloff van Goens, 1663-1675, trans. by E Reimers,1973:17).

It was in short, a systematic repression of the Moors in order to reinforce total Dutch control of commercial interest.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Both agriculture and navigation were casual and seasonal occupations (Mahroof,ibid:358).

<sup>68</sup> The Portuguese had also inter-married with the local populations (creating Portuguese Burghers) but this appears to have been less ideologically motivated than was the case with the Dutch who were concerned to establish a colony of settlers to act as "a resource of adjunct manpower for the Company" (Kotelawele,ibid:180, see McGilvray, 1983 for a further discussion of Burgher ethnicity). Plumb argues that Portugal has long been seduced by apologists within its ranks into believing "this great legend", that they were free from racial prejudice (ibid:xxv). In his view they were intensely racist, nevertheless the ideology persists and I note that there is a common saying in Portugal today: "God made people black and white, but the Portuguese made the mulattos".

<sup>69</sup> The Dutch sought to exclude the Moors from several professions and make these occupations the exclusive province of the Burgher population. Apart from trade, which had long been the province of the Moors, they targeted leather-work (against which most Hindus and Buddhists had objections on the grounds of pollution) and tailoring. The Muslims never took up trading in arrack for religious reasons (Ali,ibid:237).



A series of legislative acts were passed to control Moorish settlement, and initially they were rigorously enforced. After the conquest of Colombo separate locations were allocated for Moors, Chetties and Paravas outside the environs of the Colombo Fort and Pettah (bazaar) area. Separate headmen were appointed for each community and were responsible to the Dutch Dissawe of Colombo (Kotelaweale, *ibid*:176). Similar headships were later established in the Galle and Matara areas to prevent Muslims from moving into the interior. A Regulation of 1659 confined Moorish residence to the town limits of Galle, Matara (outside the forts) or Belligam (Weligama) (Goonewardena, *ibid*:196). This move suggests the density of Muslim settlement at these trading ports.<sup>70</sup> In 1665 Moors were forced to register themselves under threat of banishment and it was ruled that landed property could not be sold to them. In 1670 they were ordered to quit the areas around Colombo and relocate themselves between Alutgama and Galle on the Southwest coast (Mohan, *ibid*:21).<sup>71</sup> The Dutch introduced the Uliyam service; an obligatory public service to which "ordinary" Moors were subject. Merchants were obliged to pay a poll tax (Mohan, *ibid*, *op cit*). Along with the Chetties they were further taxed for wearing any kind of shoe (Schreuder, *ibid*:88). In 1744 if they could not furnish a certificate to prove that they were listed for taxation or services they were liable to be put in chains.

One way to avoid Dutch attempts to monopolize trade was smuggling, an activity which the Moors took to wholeheartedly. The Dutch administrator Schreuder commented that "the Moors in particular will not give up smuggling although it is done at the risk of life and

---

<sup>70</sup> The Dutch were also determined not to permit any new Muslims to arrive and the Governor of Dutch Ceylon wrote to the Dissawa of Matara that "The Dissawa must see that those who arrive from elsewhere are made to return by the same vessel that brings them. Special care should be taken at the harbour of Belligam (Weligama) and other outstations, that this rule is carried out" (Mahroof, 1990b:357-8). Weligama lies mid-way between Galle and Matara, both of which were the sites of Dutch forts. It is clear from the evidence above that it became a port where Dutch justice could be more readily avoided.

<sup>71</sup> These were already areas of Muslim trading settlements. Van Goens noted that Muslims living in the coastal towns of Beruwala, Maggona and Aluthgama carried on a profitable trade with the Kingdom of Kandy (Kotelaweale, *ibid*:172).

goods" (ibid:24).<sup>72</sup> The coast between Mannar and Puttalam on the island's West coast, is closest to India, and

was the chief theater of operations for smugglers, in the period prior to 1766 when these lands still belonged to the Kandyan kingdom (Kotelaweale, ibid:174).

This further strengthened the relations between the Moors and the Kandyan kingdom and the Moors served as a profitable connection with the wider world for the virtually land-locked kingdom. During the Kandyan-Dutch wars of 1760-1766, after which the Dutch gained total control of the coastline, the Moors were able to solicit support from the British in Madras for the Kandyan cause.<sup>73</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century however, the position had begun to change and with a weakening of Dutch policies of repression the Moors were permitted greater freedom to pursue their own economic interests. The Dutch

were initially averse to the granting of any offices or privileges to them...(but)...when they settled down to the task of administering their territorial conquests in (...) earnest they were forced to accept realities and grant offices and privileges to the Muslims and to use (them) in their economic scheme in the island (Kotelaweale, ibid:175-6).

It was primarily a result of the traditional expertise borne of Moorish engagement in trade that eventually led the Dutch to moderate their position. On the other hand it appears that the Moors sought always to pursue and extend their commercial interests both within and against the repressive measures ranged against them.

The Dutch established a monopoly over the areca trade which became a major source of income for them. It was gathered under a system which involved both direct purchase and tax areca. Tax areca had to be collected and delivered to the Dutch as a duty and a paltry price was paid for it. In the mid eighteenth century in the Galle and Matara districts the inhabitants let the areca rot under the trees. 'Some resourceful Moors' offered to collect the tax-areca and deliver it on the condition that further deliveries should be bought at the

---

<sup>72</sup> Schreuder notes in 1762 the extensive smuggling of cinnamon, pepper, arecanuts and coffee (ibid:v), and cloth (ibid:17), off the island's South and East coasts. See also (Kotelaweale, ibid:173, De Silva, 1981:157, Ali, 1986a:236, and Goonewardena, ibid:205).

<sup>73</sup> This was the Pybus mission of 1762, see K.M.De Silva, 1981:157-9 and Kotelaweale, ibid:179).



usual price. This proposal was agreed to by the Governor (ibid:177). Confronted with the demise in opportunities to generate income from their traditional sources of trade, the Moors exploited all economic niches left open to them. In 1746 the official laws preventing the granting of new lands to Moors and Chetties were removed and later in 1765 when new lands were made available for the cultivation of cash crops Moors were active participants (ibid:184). Another system of the Dutch administration was that of **rents**, whereby incomes (from textiles, fish, paddy, gemming, bazaars, toddy and arrack), that they were not willing to collect through headmen, were farmed out at annual auctions. By the end of the Dutch period the Moors had established themselves well in the renting business. The Dutch had taken a more generous position with regard to the poorer Moors of the island, those engaged in agriculture rather than trade, and who thus posed no threat to Dutch commercial interests. Despite the legislative inequities, the entrepreneurs prevailed over the peasants and at the end of the Dutch period there was an economic elite within the Moor community made up of traders, renters and physicians and a non-elite subject to service obligations and a poll-tax (ibid:177). Moorish persistence alone led to their continuation as an economic force on the island during the Dutch period, though in a state considerably weakened by the colonial enterprise. <sup>74</sup>

## 2.5 British Recognition 1796 - 1947

The British ousted the Dutch from the maritime provinces of the littoral in 1796 and by 1815 had subjugated the Kandyan Kingdom and gained control of the whole island. Muslim fortunes underwent a vigorous change as

persecution was halted and they were able to conduct their trading activities without restriction and the community visibly prospered (Samaraweera, 1979:245).

The British removed all the Dutch trading and social restrictions on the West coast Moors and large numbers of them migrated back to Colombo. British perceptions of the Muslim trading community led them to characterize Muslims as industrious and energetic, working from dawn until dusk, in contrast to the largely peasant Tamil and Sinhalese agricultural communities who, dependent upon seasonal rains

---

<sup>74</sup> Antagonism towards the Dutch remains in the writings of some Muslims; see Azeez who refers to "the bigoted Dutch whose antagonism to and persecution of the Moors are proverbial" (1957[1907]:2).

for their crops and with greater periods of leisure, were characterized as lazy and indolent.<sup>75</sup> The introduction of laissez-faire capitalism widened the gap between rich and poor Muslims, especially in Colombo; a gap that had already become noticeable during the late Dutch period. This internal fragmentation was the background to later political movement within the community intended to re-establish strong community ties.

The British arrival marked the beginning of a major period of transformation for the island's Muslims, one which was critical in determining the course of action for, and control of, the community in the future. It marked the final point in Muslim emergence as a unified community on the national level. This transformation was composed of a number of elements and while it took its own unique course, it cannot be separated from the political context of the times which involved all the island's ethnic communities in battles with the British. As they reacted to centuries of colonial domination, the Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus developed new nationalist ideologies which culminated in demands for self-determination. The Muslims underwent a Revival which had two broad themes; a search to define community identity and ethnicity, and a movement to improve Muslim access to education. The revival was shortly followed by the Sinhalese-Muslim Riots in 1915. The end of British rule was marked with the island's independence and a new political role for the Muslim community in the post-independence period.

The latter part of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of revivalist movements in all three of the non-Christian communities. These movements were characteristically located in the urban areas. After centuries of Christian dominance, which explicitly favoured members of the indigenous Christian (Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher) communities in education and employment within the colonial bureaucracies, the non-Christian communities sought, through largely nationalist sentiments to re-establish their own participation in this arena, and in more general capitalist development. The Buddhist revival, "which set the stage for the others" (Samaraweera,

---

<sup>75</sup> See Ameer Ali (1987) for a full discussion of this issue and comment upon the "colonial theory" (Myrdal, 1968, Vol III: 977-981) which attributed these characterizations to "certain innate ethnic traits" (ibid: 311-315).



1979:243), had as its central figure the Anagarika Dharmapala, an English educated, high-caste Buddhist from a wealthy family, who asserted an explicit ideology of Buddhist development in the context of a post-colonial capitalist system.<sup>76</sup> The Buddhist revival was followed by a Hindu revival which ran along similar lines. The Muslim revival, while it shared some aspirations with the others, has generally been classed as distinct, in that it was primarily concerned with education and ethnicity and was seen as

**less concerned with purely religious matters** than either the Buddhist or Hindu revivalist movements (Samaraweera, *ibid*:247, my emphasis, see also Mohan, 1985:29).

Although not as explicitly religious as the Buddhist and Hindu movements, which sought to re-define the dominant value of their respective religious and cultural traditions in relation to the British, there was an important religious significance to the Muslim revival. This is to be found in its assertion of the Arab origins of the community, in the arguments concerning their ethnicity.

Samaraweera calls the revivalist movement "the major force that moulded the self-identity of the Muslim community", the starting point of modern history (1986:363). Their revival entailed a "search for an identity" (Samaraweera, 1978:467), the final outcome of which was a "sedimentation of traditions" which favoured one history over another. However, in his interpretation of the events Samaraweera overlooks the fact that this search engaged an explicitly **religious** base to arguments concerning their **ethnic** character.

The debate concerning the origins of the Moors was elaborated around two traditions, one which held that they were the descendants of Arab traders, and the other that they were South Indian Tamils converted to Islam.<sup>77</sup> Within the context of the revival, the Muslim search for

---

<sup>76</sup> The Theosophical movement and European intellectuals were also a significant force in this revival (Kapferer, 1983:24).

<sup>77</sup> Samaraweera argues that there were two distinct literary traditions in the late nineteenth century; the first stated that the community originated from Dravidians in South India who had been converted to Islam by Arab traders (long involved in Indian Ocean trade) and the second that the community members were the descendants of Arab traders who settled in South India. Both traditions locate the community as originating from South India. This contradicts much local informants' testimony and some of the evidence. It should be remembered that these were not necessarily competing histories but the separate histories of different fractions of this disparate

an identity "involved the firm acceptance of the one and the vehement rejection of the other" (Samaraweera, 1978:468). This is the level at which the Muslim revival is to be interpreted as indeed having an explicitly religious character, although distinct from the more overtly religious cultural revivals of the Buddhists and Hindus.

Considerable momentum was provided to the Muslim revival by the arrival in the island in 1883 of an Egyptian, Arabi Pasha, who was exiled there by the British as the result of a revolt which he led against them.<sup>78</sup> Although he eschewed all engagement in local politics, a possibility which had been of some concern to the British authorities, he became a significant force within the Muslim community.<sup>79</sup> He is recognized, correctly, by Samaraweera (1979:247, 1978:470) as a symbol around which the community could gather, but the critical significance of his symbolism has not been addressed. At the time, the Muslim community of the island was fragmented "by class, life style and regional (and perhaps even ethnic) differences" (Samaraweera, 1978:469). The agriculturalists of the Eastern Province were largely a peasant population and the scattered settlement patterns of the rest of the community had not, prior to this, led to the existence of a common religion serving as a unifying force at the national, political level. In the context of growing nationalist revivalist sentiment among the indigenous population, it was Arabi Pasha and not a member of the local elite who had the "mantel (sic) of leadership" thrust upon him (ibid, op cit). It is significant that Arabi Pasha, as a Muslim outsider, was in a unique position to encompass the totality of the Muslim community. Samaraweera notes, but does not attribute much significance to the fact, that an impression was created that

---

community. Nonetheless this period marked a coalescence of histories - a totalizing movement which condensed many truths into only one.

<sup>78</sup> Colonel Orabi el Misr was born the son of fellahin. He joined the Egyptian army, rose to the position of Colonel and finally became Minister of War. As "Leader of the Nationalist Party - he led the famous 'Arabi Pasha Revolt of 1881-82 against the domination of England and France" (Mahroof, 1992:20 & ff).

<sup>79</sup> The extent of his new role vis-a-vis the British may be determined by the fact that at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations for Queen Victoria, it was Arabi and three fellow exiles who headed the Muslim procession (Samaraweera, 1979:246).



in coming to the island, Arabi was guided by an old Arabian tradition that Sri Lanka was the home of 'Man's First Parents',

and this gave his presence in the island a "special meaning" (ibid:246-7).<sup>80</sup> Another possibility according to Samaraweera was a local appreciation of his "nationalist" role in Egyptian politics (ibid:246) but in my view this is of little significance.<sup>81</sup> Rather it was his role as "orthodox outsider", interpreted as virtually on a **pilgrimage** to Ceylon, which explains both, his

---

<sup>80</sup> Arabi Pasha chose his place of exile based on the Arabic tradition that Adam had first set foot on earth in Ceylon. He wanted to be closer to Paradise (Samaraweera, 1986:369). Many Muslims believe that Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka is the place where Adam first set foot on earth outside Paradise. This fact had made the island a site of pilgrimage to Middle Eastern Muslims in earlier times, indeed Ibn Battuta came to the island on pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. In Chapter Four the miraculous arrival of Middle Eastern Muslim saints in stone boxes/tombs on the shores of the island is fully discussed in the context of local cosmological understandings. For the present I note that Arabi Pasha's arrival, "guided by an old tradition" could also be seen as a "miraculous return", one which ensured his interpretation as a legitimate religious figure.

<sup>81</sup> Informants consistently stated that wherever Muslims live as a minority in a non-Muslim country, they are obliged to offer their allegiance to the government of the day. Similar statements from Muslims consistently appeared in the media also: "... a strict abstention from Partisanship and loyalty to the government wherever they reside ..." (*The Island*, 10/11/84). This explains why Arabi's role as a "freedom fighter" against the British, the "hero" of Tel al Kabir (Samaraweera, 1978:469), was not the basis of his significance to the Muslim community at this time. This was a community which was largely favoured by, and offered its support to, the British colonial government. The most recent and telling historical example was during the Kandy Rebellion when the Moors took an independent stance, vis-a-vis the Sinhalese community, and remained staunchly loyal to the British (K.M.De Silva, 1981:234). A keynote address by M.H.Mohammed - Minister for Transport and Muslim Affairs (at the International Seminar on Shariah and the Social Order, Bangkok) was a more recent, explicit presentation of ideology on the issue.

The Shariah forbids most vehemently, any argumentation with adherents of other religions and societies, on the Quranic injunction "... to you your religion, to me, mine own" ...seen in this light, the political imperatives of the Shariah... demand(s) of a Muslim his **complete obedience to the laws of the state**. It means the unstinted patriotism of every group within the social framework (*Daily News* 20/2/85, my emphasis).

The timing of these statements in the light of the continuing ethnic struggle between the Tamil separatists and the agencies of the Sinhalese Buddhist state should not be overlooked. However, they reflect a long-standing and widely-held view, no doubt borne of an historical, minority, ethnic and religious status, and the congruence found in the Hadith (see also Ali, 1986b:154).



becoming the charismatic focus of the Muslim revival, and his ability to unify the Muslim community. It was his perceived location in a cosmological schema rather than his role as a political freedom fighter which made him an apposite figure in this context.

It was also at this period that a Muslim national elite emerged for the first time. Following Roberts (1982), Samaraweera argues that prior to this the fragmented Muslim community, had only local leaders and local elites, in contrast to the other communities amongst whom national elites had already arisen. It was this absence of any national Muslim figures at this time and Arabi Pasha's ability to assume a charismatic leadership role within the community that was a prime factor in his significance. He was further in a position to take an encompassing role, regionally un-connected and nationally embraced.

This is where Samaraweera locates his symbolic significance entirely, without exploring the ideological conditions of his dominance. However, as I have argued above, the reasons for his symbolic significance run deeper than this. A further vital factor in his assumption of the leadership role (as symbol if not politically active figure) was the force generated in a sedimentation of the tradition of Arab origins, and as a consequence, the establishment of political and economic hegemony by the fraction of the community to whom these traditions most immediately applied. Thus, although the traders of the South-west coast already held a dominant economic position within the community viewed as a whole, the emergence at this period of a national elite among this group, in conjunction with a national revivalist movement which found much of its meaning in the final assertion of an Arab identity, determined that this fraction was placed in a position from which they could continue to legitimately dominate the community in **both** religious and economic terms. Alternatively their continued economic dominance could be seen as religiously legitimated.

In the following Chapter the debate over the 'ethnicity' of the diverse Muslim community, and its religious significance within the community, is discussed in full and I do not take it up here. In short however, we are dealing with a schema of religious and ethnic origin, which powerfully condenses the Arabic origins of Islam, the Arabic trading origins of the community, and the place of Ceylon within an Arabic cosmology as the home of man's first parents, into an ontology of the Moors.



The other focus of the Muslim revival was an awakening within the community to the value of a secular education.<sup>82</sup> The Muslim community during the nineteenth century was notorious for its educational backwardness, as a result of an explicit refusal to associate with the Christian schools of the European colonial powers which were recognized as agencies of conversion.<sup>83</sup> In conjunction with this there was a general attitude which placed religious education and the status of religious knowledge above a modern education and employment in the Christian dominated bureaucracy. Secular education was seen to offer little chance of material improvement in the community and trading itself was not believed to require or benefit from a secular education.<sup>84</sup> During the revivalist period considerable effort was directed towards the establishment of Muslim schools, but community indifference and an insistence that the Koran and Arabic be the basis of initial learning blocked this development. The conservative community believed that "for boys and girls alike intellectual ambition begins and ends with the Koran" (A.R., 1890, pD19), cited Samaraweera, 1979:250).<sup>85</sup> Financial grants from the government required an annual examination in Sinhalese or Tamil and this proved problematic, when the entire first year of schooling was devoted to the Koran and Arabic, and only in the second year were the other languages taken up and funding granted.<sup>86</sup> A further problem was that

---

<sup>82</sup> Education was a concern of all three revival movements and both the Buddhist and Hindu communities readily acknowledged the need to allow their children to compete for employment in both the government service and professions such as law and medicine (Samaraweera, 1986:389). Much of the renewed interest in Education was influenced by the shift in importance of English as a commercial language.

<sup>83</sup> The Christians soon ignored the Muslims because of the difficulty of conversion. From a Muslim perspective the schools were seen to lack relevance because Koranic studies were not covered and participation in the trading sector was not seen to benefit from a Christian education. See also Goonewardena (ibid:190).

<sup>84</sup> Mines cites the existence of similar sentiments among Muslims in Tamil Nadu (1972:101).

<sup>85</sup> There were also attempts to establish several schools for Muslim girls. The strongest opposition to this idea arose among the religious figures in Kandy, but despite this, a school was established there by the sister of Siddi Lebbe, a Christian educated Colombo Muslim who worked tirelessly in the field of educational reform (see also Wimalaratne, 1986:427).

<sup>86</sup> Siddi Lebbe, whose commitment to Muslim education pre-dated Arabi Pasha's arrival, constantly sought to have the Education Code revoked, so that Muslim schools could be examined in Arabic, but was unsuccessful.

teachers skilled in Arabic were the products of an entirely religious education with little facility as teachers in other areas.<sup>87</sup> Many schools that were established ran into considerable difficulty and foundered, but there remained nonetheless a consistent effort on the part of the leadership to introduce a modern educational alternative to the traditional "verrandah system" (Samaraweera, ibid:255).<sup>88</sup> The overall concern of the educational efforts of the community's leadership was to modernism, and

more enlightened Muslim leaders were profoundly disturbed to find their community sunk in ignorance and apathy, parochial and grossly materialistic (Mohan, 1985:28-9).

It was not until 1939 that an ordinance was passed which governed the integration of religion into the school curriculum.<sup>89</sup> At this time Islamic syllabi were formulated and textbooks produced for schools. The Education Department also agreed to recognize the qualifications of the Madrasah graduates and to pay their salaries (Mahroof, ibid op cit). This was a huge boost to the Muslim community.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> These teachers were the products of the Madrasahs - essentially theological colleges where boys received free board and lodging along with free tuition for a seven year period of training. They graduated with the degree of **alim**. The two earliest madrasahs in Ceylon were established in the 1880's. The first was the **Madrasat ul-Bari in Weligama** (1884) (whose centenary celebration I observed) and the other was the **Madrasat ul Bahjath ul Ibrahimiyya** in Galle (1892). The principals and staff of these colleges were as a rule **ulema** from South India. This factor and their non-use of Urdu marked a separation between the Muslim intellectuals of Ceylon and those of India (Mahroof, 1991:12, see also Shukri, 1986:354 and Mahroof, 1990b:363).

<sup>88</sup> The Malay Muslims had always been "more willing" (Mahroof, 1990a:58) to embrace education. Initially some of the exiles had established **pesantiren**, Qur'an schools, which had been accepted and patronized by resident Sunni Muslims (ibid:56). During the revivalist period however, "not a single school was established" in the Eastern Province, a situation which Samaraweera terms "an indictment on the Muslim educationalists" (ibid:256). This reflects accurately the position of the Eastern Province at the time as a region of minor importance in the island's developing capitalist system, "the Siberia of Ceylon" (K.M.De Silva, 1981).

<sup>89</sup> Section 4, Ordinance No. 26 1939 (Mahroof, 1991:14-15).

<sup>90</sup> The standard arguments concerning the Muslim community's lack of interest in Education have recently been challenged as ethnocentric. Mahroof (1991:5) argues that the Muslims in the island who left Arabia in the Eighth Century, educated themselves in their own enclaves. This tradition of a mosque centred education system with an Islamic basis continued within the community. The two central features of this community education were the Qur'an schools which taught children recitation, reading and writing of Arabic and also arithmetic. The other was the training of the ulema. I think the overall characterization of the community as lacking an interest in



Numerous Literary and Friendship societies were established, modelled on similar associations established in the Buddhist and Hindu communities. In the journalistic field also, newspapers and journals rang with the message of the regeneration of the community (Samaraweera, ibid:257-60). The press was the site of a vigorous discourse as for the first time "the community was attempting to define and set goals for itself within the context of Sri Lanka's plural society" (Samaraweera, 1986:373). Overall the readership was limited to the elite and newspapers and journals were often short-lived because they competed so strongly within such a small market. One critical factor to note however was that they often carried information about Muslims in other countries. In conjunction with the emergence of a national elite we must also credit that there was a new level of awareness of an identity as Muslim members of a wider religious community - *ummah*.<sup>91</sup> Sidde Lebbe founded the Tamil language *Muslim Naisan* (Muslim Friend) in 1882. Among other items it carried information about the Caliph of Islam, the Turkish defender of the faith who was mentioned in Jumma prayers (Shukri, ibid:357).

The movements in the fields of education and journalism are indices of the emerging 'collective identity', an identity which was clearly contested for a considerable period of time. The moves to broaden access to education and to refocus it towards secular skills (albeit within a traditional Islamic context) challenged the traditional role of the ulema. Teachers were transformed from their traditional roles (Mahroof, 1990b:364) and essentially co-opted into the newly organized and eventually government funded, education system.

---

education is ethnocentric but it appears that Mahroof overstates his case for ideological reasons. The first madrasahs were not established until the 1880's (cf ff 87 above). On a slightly different tack Mahroof (ibid) argues that education has always been founded on Islamic principles and where it was not (as in the colonial periods) the Muslims have neglected it.

<sup>91</sup> It is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy to what extent the various Muslim communities of Ceylon previously saw themselves as members of a world-wide Muslim community. There is no evidence to suggest that the Haj was a significant practice at this time. I suspect that the clearest line to take is that as with the other communities in the island there were those with quite cosmopolitan trading connections, engaged in a wider arena of ideas about religion and the polity, and also there were Muslims aware of their common religious links to Muslims in other countries but not with a great deal in common beyond that.

Another critical effect of the Revivalist movement and the establishment of a South-Western hegemony over the island's Muslim community was the move to re-order the community's adherence to Islamic doctrine. It marked the first period in which "laymen came forward to challenge the exclusive jurisdiction of the men of religion over doctrinal matters" (Samaraweera, 1979:265). The Dowry system in particular, was regarded as a "slur" on the community (Bawa 1888:219-220), not only with regard to the fact that the requirement of dowry was held to be un-Islamic, but also that it was a field in which the *lebbes* as Marriage Registrars could commit irregularities (Samaraweera, *ibid*:266-7). The Muslim reformers sought to pass this traditionally religious authority over Muslim marriage and divorce to the control of the state. This raised enormous controversy among the religious leaders of the time and as a result the *Mohammedan Marriage Registration Ordinance of 1886* was not promulgated until 1888, and registration remained optional.<sup>92</sup> This initially unsuccessful early move by the reformers and modernisers to seek the power of the state, to control aspects of what had previously been regarded as the province of the religious leaders, did not stop them. A similar thrust was later observed in the establishment of the state control of mosques, with the passing of the *Waqfs* ordinance.<sup>93</sup> These actions must be interpreted as the dominant Muslim fraction seeking the power of the state, a state within which they were endorsed as the legitimate fraction with access to power, to extend their own hegemony over the Muslim community.

The general perception of the Hindu and Buddhist revivals is that they were cultural/religious movements with political overtones, the earliest stirrings of Nationalism. The Muslim revival was explicitly concerned with the two factors of ethnicity and education, and in both areas expressly religious considerations were engaged. Although

---

<sup>92</sup> The reforms desired by the reformers were not undertaken until 1926 (Samaraweera, *ibid*:268, see also Mahroof, 1987). In the research area the prevailing perception of the legitimacy of state protection of religious matters, was that as Buddhism is a **state** religion, so there are Ministers for Hindu and Muslim affairs. In 1984 Mr M.H.Naina Marrikar (the Deputy Minister for Finance and Planning) was arguing that the administration of the Qazis (Muslim judges) and the Qazi Courts, should "be taken over by the Ministry so that they could function properly" (*Daily News* 15/12/84).

<sup>93</sup> *Waqfs* refers to the "endowment of movable or immovable property for religious purposes in Islam" (Troll, 1992:149, see also Mahroof, 1985). In most cases this is the charitable donation of mosque properties to God. This is an issue I take up below in Chapter Five.



the revival has not been characterized by scholars as either religious or political, I assert that it was clearly both. In the period of the revival Arab origins were asserted successfully as an answer to the "crisis of identity" of the island's disparate Muslim communities, and the dominant fraction of the Muslim community began their challenge to the traditional religious authority of those communities' religious leaders. The enshrinement of the recently emerged first Muslim national elite was avowedly political, a politics nevertheless in which the arena was religious, and domination to be sought in **religious** terms.<sup>94</sup>

This emergent national Muslim identity was further reinforced in the 1915 Buddhist-Muslim riots. Suppressed brutally by the British, they were of great importance in the island's history "because they served as a catalyst for the growth of demands for Ceylonese self-government" (Kearney, 1970:219).<sup>95</sup> Jayawardena points out that these riots are not to be understood as merely

an eruption of religious animosity between Sinhalese Buddhists and a fraction of the Muslim population (...) sparked by religious fanaticism (1970:223),

but that rather the explanation is to be sought in the political and economic conditions of the time. In the years immediately preceding the riots and emergent from the Buddhist revival, an awakening nationalism in the Sinhalese community had been directed initially against Christianity and missionary education, and later against both the continued domination of the British, and the economic power of the minority groups. The Coast Moors who were the initial focus of the riots were particularly despised as rapacious money-lenders and exploiters of the Sinhalese peasantry. Although they were primarily

---

<sup>94</sup> The widespread perception of the community at this time as one in which identity was tied to religion is demonstrated in the reports concerning the "Faz Question" of 1905. This is cited as one instance when the Muslim community "stood together" (Samaraweera, 1979:268). A Muslim Advocate was forbidden by the Chief Justice, to appear before the High Court, with "both head and feet covered" (ibid, op cit). It was declared that he could wear the Faz, only if he wore the 'traditional' dress of sarong and coat (itself British), but not if he wore European dress. For Muslims it is a mark of respect to cover one's head before God or temporal authority and this refusal was widely interpreted as an "affront to the religion" (ibid, op cit). Massive support was forthcoming, reportedly attracting a crowd of 30,000 Muslims to a meeting at the Maradana mosque and also attracting support from the Buddhist and Hindu communities as well. The ruling was eventually withdrawn.

<sup>95</sup> A total of 34 people were executed and 4,497 convicted of various offences (Blackton, 1970:249).

the target of Sinhalese anger, the distinction between Coast Moors and Ceylon Moors was not always maintained during the riots.

The riots were sparked by an incident in Gampola, near Kandy, and soon spread throughout the Southern, Western and Northwestern districts of the island. In Gampola, Buddhists and Moors had traditionally lived in harmony. However following the building by Coast Moors of a new mosque in 1907, they "promptly raised objections to the Buddhist Esala **Perahera** which traditionally passed along that way with music and beating of drums" (Blackton, 1970:237). The Buddhists argued that this was a "**via sacra** laid out by ancient custom" (ibid, op cit) and they believed it to be guaranteed by the 1815 Kandyan Convention. Despite the fact that no other Moor populations had previously complained, the Coast Moors registered their protests each year and in 1909 the procession was rerouted. In 1911 the argument again recurred and the government

agreed to a return to the traditional route provided that the Buddhist's music and drumming cease 50 yards on either side of the Coast Moormen's mosque (ibid, op cit).

Between 1911 and 1915 the matter remained within the Courts and communal tension began to erupt in small incidents. It was in May 1915, just after **Wesak** (the Buddha's birthday) when the Buddhist Esala Perahera

led by the Maligawa's giant tusker wearing false silvered tusks and bearing the Tooth in a jewelled casket ... escorted by drummers, dancers and torchbearers (loc cit)

was about to pass the new mosque in Castle Hill Street that trouble flared. The singers had agreed to be silent when they passed the mosque on their traditional route but the crowd in attendance had grown so great that a police decision was taken to divert the procession away from the mosque altogether. As the procession turned away

some Moormen outside the mosque jeered and hooted as if they had bested the Buddhists after all. So the latter returned, attacked the Moormen and wrecked the mosque, going on to attack their shops (Diary of R.N. Lyne, in C.O.54/782 (33883) cited ibid:239).

After this, sporadic violence ensued and a number of other mosques were wrecked, a Sinhalese murdered and a Muslim priest stabbed. A rumour spread in Kandy that gangs of Moors were coming to Kandy to "destroy the Maligawa in retaliation for mosques wrecked" (ibid, op cit). The rioting spread throughout the Sinhalese districts over the next few days and during attacks led by Sinhalese headmen and



instigated by Buddhist monks, numerous mosques were destroyed. In the Western Province alone some 600 villages saw attacks on Moors and property, and large numbers of mosques were destroyed. In Colombo by contrast, the prime force in the riots was the working class and this "mob",

was not bent on attacking the Moors themselves or pillaging their places of worship on religious grounds, but rather on plundering the Moor's shops, which symbolized the hardships caused by profiteering and unfair trade practices (Jayawardena, ibid:229).

The British government interpreted the riots as a "rebellion" against British rule and as part of their ruthless suppression proclaimed Martial Law which was not lifted until 30th August (Fernando, 1970:255). Sinhalese were confined to their villages for weeks after the riots and the Riots Damages Ordinance introduced the principle of 'district responsibility' in collecting compensation. According to this ordinance, even those who had nothing to do with the disturbances had to pay compensation to the Muslims if they lived in an area where rioting had occurred (ibid, op cit).

The impact of the riots within the Muslim community at the time has been largely left unstudied, (rather the focus has been on the development of Sinhalese nationalism), but Samaraweera argues that their principal effect was a feeling of "helplessness" among them (1979:271). A helplessness which he believes may have attributed to "the even closer collaboration of the Muslim leaders with the government which was seen in the years to come" (ibid, op cit). Certainly we must observe that a new level of religious identity has been formed, one in which religious symbols of the community were attacked en masse and one in which their economic dominance (although limited to a fraction of the community) became a symbol of their wider identity also. The closer relationships established between the elite and the government are hardly surprising.

## **2.6 Post Independence 1948 -**

Ali notes that prior to the granting of Independence in 1948 the Muslim community had a peripheral role in politics and he classes them as 'observers' rather than 'participators' (1986:147). As we have seen however, historically they were not without influence in Ceylon, particularly in the Kandyan Kingdom, and on several occasions had sought to directly subvert and obstruct colonial policy, when it conflicted with their trading activities. During the events of the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which saw the debate on Muslim ethnicity, the revivalist movement and the Sinhala-Muslim riots, their ~~common~~ Muslim identity was strengthened. Their direct engagement in local politics where it concerned government however was still marginal. The British period may be characterized as one which saw the crystallization of a polity increasingly defined in communal terms, a polity in which the Muslims were a minority. The problem they faced as a minority community was the fact of their demographic distribution, which was in most districts one of consistent and acute minority status.<sup>96</sup> They were however an electorally significant minority, prepared to engage in "bargaining strategies...(and)...Muslim support remained crucial to any political party that aspired to form a government until 1977" (Ali, 1986b:154-162). The United National Party won a "landslide" victory in 1977, one which most Muslims supported.<sup>97</sup> In 1978 the U.N.P. introduced significant changes to the constitution (Ali, *ibid*:162), two of which are critical to the future political tactics of the Muslim community. Firstly, the new system of proportional representation significantly devalued the "deterministic role" that Muslims votes played earlier (*ibid*, *op cit*). Secondly, this constitutional change, which devalued the minorities voting strengths has been interpreted by some Muslims as "the retaliation by the Sinhalese majority to the electoral tactics of the minorities" (*ibid*, *op cit*). While Tamil politics have emphasised regional autonomy the Muslims (influenced by their vastly different settlement patterns) have wisely joined National political parties rather than establish a separate Muslim political party. In a number of electorates where the Muslims are a minority, Muslim candidates as members of the U.N.P. or S.L.F.P. have consistently been elected by Sinhalese majorities on party grounds (K.M.De Silva, 1986b:446).

As a community they have been more valued by recent UNP governments for their "Islamic connection with the Muslim countries than for (their) role in the island's domestic politics or economy" (Ali, *ibid*:163). This is due to the importance of the Arab states as both markets for exports, and the employers of large numbers of foreign migrant workers. By 1983 some 150,000 Sri Lankans were

---

<sup>96</sup> This again reflects their 'ubiquitous' pattern of settlement.

<sup>97</sup> One problem recently facing the Muslim intelligentsia is that "the total identification of Muslim politics with the United National Party may be counter-productive" *Lanka Guardian* 7 (23 & 24), April 1, 1985:1.



employed in the Middle Eastern states (ibid, op cit) and their remittances are reportedly the second highest generator of foreign exchange after export sales of tea.<sup>98</sup> These two factors; the Middle East as market for workers and exports, and the possibilities of funds from the "Arab charity purse" have determined that recent governments have offered the post of Foreign Minister to a Muslim (ibid, op cit).<sup>99</sup> This is in line with a more general and long-standing policy of rewarding loyalists in the minority elite by giving them ministerial posts (Phadnis, 1979:47).

The community is currently facing severe political problems. A major concern is their apparent "neutrality" in the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict engulfing the island (Ali, ibid:163) One third of the Muslims reside in the Tamil districts and there have been a number of Muslim-Tamil clashes, some believed to have been stirred up by the Sinhalese military forces in the Eastern Province.<sup>100</sup>

(T)he Muslims have been caught in the communal cross-fire. The northern terrorist movement is trying to infiltrate the East (...) harping on the fact that both Muslims and Tamils share a common language, and is trying to win sympathy for the Tamil cause.

But Muslims have generally been suspicious of Tamil motivations in such a context and have been particularly opposed to moves to amalgamate the North and East as one administrative unit (*The Island* 17/4/85).

---

<sup>98</sup> In 1983 private remittances from overseas accounted for 17% of the island's total foreign earnings, with 60% of that figure coming from guest-workers in the Middle East. Remittances rose from 2 million Rupees in 1973 to 6957 million Rupees in 1983. These figures are now being reduced by the fact that the Bangladesh employment market is opening up (Central Bank of Ceylon Reports, 1982, 1983, cited in *The Island* 12/8/84 p4). The Middle East guest-worker economy has also had a significant role in reducing internal unemployment. In 1983 "43% (57,000) of the nett annual addition to the work force emigrated there for employment" (ibid, op cit), bringing the total number of Sri Lankans employed there to 175,000.

<sup>99</sup> J.R. Jayewardena appointed A.C.S. Hameed as Minister of Foreign affairs in order to earn points both at home and abroad. During my period of fieldwork this appointment was cynically regarded by some Muslims who referred to the Foreign Minister as "The Minister for getting money from Arabic connections". Muslims also are well aware of the critical value of the Middle Eastern states as protectors of their interests and numerous informants expressed the view that the migrant workers there were in effect "hostages" against the threat of any Sinhalese communal attacks on their community.

<sup>100</sup> A reportedly popular Tamil militant tactic for raising funds in the Batticaloa District was the regular kidnapping, and holding for ransom, of young Muslim men in the area.

In response to this new threat, the Muslim elite has been quick to make public statements of support for the government, stressing the long ties of friendship between Muslims and Sinhalese, and taking an active part in multi-faith religious programmes to pray for peace.<sup>101</sup> The All-Ceylon Moors Association convened a meeting at which a large gathering of Muslim M.P.'s, lawyers, businessmen and others, decided that the Muslim community should "play a positive and dynamic role in bringing about national peace and unity in Sri Lanka" (*Daily News* 17/1/85). The political aspects of this campaign were so successful that the then Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, declared that the Muslims were "angels of peace" (*Daily News* 21/8/84). The late National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali, further praised "the religious attitudes of "brotherhood" and "equality" among the Muslims which had helped them live peacefully in the country for a very long time" (*The Island* 21/12/84).<sup>102</sup> This potent political alliance between the Muslim elite and the Sinhalese government however, does not necessarily reflect the views of the East coast Muslims, who share many of the economic and social disadvantages of the East coast Tamil population.<sup>103</sup> This region does not yet however reflect at the national level the separate political interests of the poorer majority of Muslims who live here.

In the 1950's there had been a brief alliance between some of the Muslims of the Eastern Province and Tamils who were attempting to build an organization of "Tamil-speaking peoples" of Sri Lanka in order to preserve their language rights. The alliance did not last and in general since then

Muslims have been among the most inveterate opponents of federalism and separatism, seeing in these the conferment of advantages on the Tamils which could endanger Muslim interests to a far greater extent than the country's unitary political structure (K.M.De Silva, *ibid*:449).

There is no doubt however that if the country is divided as Tamil separatists demand, it is feared that the young Muslims of the Central Districts, many of whom are being educated in the Sinhalese

---

<sup>101</sup> "A Muslim religious ceremony was held at the Jumma Mosque in Dematagoda to invoke blessings on the people of Sri Lanka, and on the armed forces currently engaged in defending the nation" (*Daily Mail* 14/1/85).

<sup>102</sup> Both Ranasinghe Premadasa and Lalith Athulathmudali were subsequently assassinated by Tamil forces.

<sup>103</sup> There were many local reports of young Muslims in the Batticaloa region joining the militant movement.



medium, will lose the ability to speak Tamil, and the Muslim community will become linguistically divided. The fact that Tamil is predominantly the language of religious texts and sermons, with few understanding Arabic, makes this a critical factor.

This chapter has pointed to the complexity of Muslim settlement and reveals some issues I now want to take up, in a discussion of their competing interpretations of this history and the contradictions that continually arise as a result of movements to totalise.

## Chapter Three :

### Interpretations and Contradictions

The Muslims have a diverse history of settlement in the island and as I have argued, their perceptions of themselves as a unified community have increasingly been forged in the face of external contingency. This began with Portuguese opposition, was followed by Dutch repression and finally faced British concerns with devolving power along communal lines. Their construction of a unified history however, has been fraught with contradictions, which reflect the basic diversity of the community. The production of histories is always complex and continually meaningful. In this instance the complexity is borne of diverse historical origins and experience, and the necessity to compete for power as a unified group in the late colonial period. An explicit assertion of a distinct, non-Tamil identity took place in the context of rapid class formation under the British, where power was to be inherited proportionally by ethnic groups. This unified history was imbued with religious meaning. Prior to the revival there had been recognition of two distinct traditions. One stated that the community were the descendants of Arab traders and the other that they were Tamils from Kayalpattanam in South India. The revival involved the acceptance of one tradition and the firm rejection of the other. What was probably historical fact for a minority segment of the diverse Muslim population, became an ideology endorsed by the elite, and subsequently, the history of the many.

In this chapter I take up two Muslim interpretations of their history which are loaded with symbolic import. The first was publicly aired in the "Ethnology Debate" which arose in the late nineteenth century and was concerned to establish whether the Muslims were the descendants of Arab traders or Tamil converts to Islam. The second concerns the representation of Muslims as traders, and I examine this representation for its social and religious significance.

#### 3.1 A symbolic history.

The most popular representation of the origins of the Ceylon Moor community is that 'Sri Lankan Muslims are the descendants of Arab traders who settled on the island and married local Tamil women',



and it is here that any discussion of the history of the community should begin.<sup>1</sup> This simple statement of ideology condenses a wealth of historical complexity. It portrays the community as a unitary one, with a common history and a common point of origin, in a manner which condenses their historical and ethnic diversity. It is of significant interest to determine what historical circumstances have led the community to emerge with the particular identity that it currently has.

Abeyasinghe writes that the Muslims in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were "a people without an historical tradition" (1986:129). This lack of a specifically religious or unitary history, in contrast to the Hindus and Buddhists in the island, reflects accurately the position before the emergence of the national elites, a factor which was critical to the establishment of a Muslim symbolic history. National elite formation influenced the shape which that symbolic history developed. The formation of national elites took place within a political order whose fundamental language was hierarchy. In this context to argue that one was from a high category, of impeccable Arab stock for example, enabled the Muslim community to engage with other 'high' groups - the Goyigama and Karava of the Sinhalese community and the Velallas of the Tamil community.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of these hierarchical ideas must be assumed to have already made their way into the Muslim community, indeed they were reflected in the division of the community into caste-like groups, but in this political context they began to act sharply in the structures of internal political domination. The location of much of this political re-ordering in all communities was confined to the Western and Central Provinces and thus also lent to those Muslims the

---

<sup>1</sup> In some instances it is held that Arabs also married Sinhalese women and this certainly was the case in the Kandyan kingdom. Generally historical sources suggest that they married predominantly Tamil women, from Tamil trading families, even in the areas of heavy Sinhalese settlement. The 'bogey' of mass Sinhalese conversion to Islam was often conjured up by the Dutch in order to justify discriminatory practices. (Koloniaal Archief of the Algemeen Rijksarchief at the Hague, 1121, folios 106-08, cited Goonewardena, 1986:93). It is possible that in conjunction with the recent statements stressing Sinhala-Muslim unity that there will be a growing emphasis on Sinhalese wives in the histories.

<sup>2</sup> The Goyigama are the highest Sinhalese caste, closely followed by the Karava. The Velalla are the highest Tamil Hindu caste in the island.

chance to exploit their historical traditions, to construct new meaning in them and even to generate new significant traditions. These traditions were nonetheless, of wider ontological significance prior to this.<sup>3</sup> I am concerned with the increasing deployment of a religious ideology in a process whereby an ethnically and culturally diverse group of Muslims came to share a common set of religious and ideological assumptions and how they came increasingly to forge their collective action through them.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 The "Ethnology" of the "Moors of Ceylon."

The ideological value of the Arab origins of the Sri Lankan Muslims received its most explicit airing in the political arena of public debate. A prominent Tamil member of the Legislative Council, Sir Ponnambulam Ramanathan, in 1885 during a parliamentary debate on the Mohammedan Marriage Registration Ordinance, expressed his view that the Moors of Ceylon were not a separate race.<sup>5</sup> They were, he argued, "Tamils in nationality and Mohammedans in religion" (I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, *ibid*:1). This speech, which was reported in the English newspapers, was answered by Siddi Lebbe with a series of articles on the Arab ancestry of the Ceylon Moors. In these he refuted Ramanathan's claims and argued that most of the Ceylon Moors were the descendants of Arab colonists who had settled on the island centuries

---

<sup>3</sup> The Muslim construction of history has a significance which requires us to look at cosmologies, cosmologies which they think are vitally important. That history is symbolic for Muslims in the Sri Lankan context is evident in their rituals and in culturally and historically constituted perceptions of male-female relations. A constant contradiction arises for Muslims from the local, non-Islamic customs of their wives, a contradiction that is specifically addressed in the marriage rites. These issues are taken up in detail later in the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> This hegemonic domination reflects only the ruling concerns and outcomes in the political arena of the time. History is always contested and the Muslims of the Eastern Province have probably never accepted and are certainly beginning to challenge these interpretations of orthodox legitimacy (cf below).

<sup>5</sup> Ponnambulam Ramanathan was "a gentleman of great renown and world-wide fame; a brilliant and accomplished lawyer, having filled for some time, with credit to himself and the Ceylonese in general, the responsible position of Her Majesty's Solicitor General in Ceylon; and a man of much intellectual attainment and public spiritedness" (*ibid*, op cit). Some years later in 1911, he was elected to the 'Educated Ceylonese' constituency (K.M.De Silva, 1981:384), a position of great moral authority.



before. These articles were published in the Tamil language newspaper *Muslim Naisan* whose unfailing message was the "reawakening and re-generation of the community" (Samaraweera, 1979:258). Ramanathan chose not to re-assert his views in the press in answer to these articles and the debate remained unresolved. Three years later, on the 26th April 1888, Ramanathan delivered a paper titled *The Ethnology of the "Moors" of Ceylon* to the Royal Asiatic Society in Colombo. He argued again that the ancestors of the Moors of Ceylon were Tamils who had originated from South India and embraced Islam and settled in the island in the fourteenth century. During British rule in Sri Lanka the Royal Asiatic Society "functioned as the principal forum for Academic debate" (ibid:261), and in the context of a British colonial government that laboured under an ideology of communal representation for native groups, the impact of his paper on the Muslim community was considerable.

In the Legislative Council created in 1883, the Muslims were not represented by a separate member, rather, the Tamil member, as the representative of all Tamil speaking inhabitants of the island, served them as well. But a restructuring of the Legislative Council was proposed in which both the Muslims and the Kandyan Sinhalese were to be represented with separate members. Ramanathan's paper, timed as it was, just prior to this proposed restructuring, and more importantly, his taking the position as representative of all Tamil-speaking inhabitants in the island, was not well received.<sup>6</sup> It was widely believed

that his object in calling the Moors Tamils in race was to dissuade the Government from appointing a Moorish member in Council, it having leaked out then that the Government were contemplating to appoint such a one, and to make them understand that there was no necessity for taking such a step, as the Moors did not form a distinct race (I.L.M.Azeez, ibid:2).

The fact that he was the incumbent Tamil member and further, had not entered into a public debate in the newspapers, but had chosen another highly influential platform from which to propound his views, was perceived to be further evidence of his ideological intent. He was accused of ignoring the traditions of the Moors themselves, of being prejudiced, partial, of relying on the evidence of a historian,

---

<sup>6</sup> He was at this time British appointed representative of the island's Tamil-speaking inhabitants.

Valentyn, one of the "bigotted Dutch" and of ignoring abundant evidence contrary to his purpose (ibid,op cit).

Ramanathan sought to establish his thesis that the "Moors" like the Tamils were of a common Dravidian stock, on four counts; their language, history, social customs and physical features (ibid:239). In elaborating his argument that the Tamil language of the Moors was evidence of their Tamil nationality, he followed Max Muller who argued that

if there is one safe exponent of nationality it is language...(and)...(I)n ancient times particularly 'language and nation' meant the same thing... (ibid:238).

Calling to attention the diversities of creed and custom to be found amongst Tamils of Brahmin, Vellala and Paraya castes, and between Low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese, Ramanathan argued that these people are known simply as Tamil or Sinhalese because they speak those languages.

Language in Oriental countries is considered the most important part of nationality, outweighing differences of religion, institutions and physical characteristics. Otherwise each caste would pass for a race (ibid:262).

A common language as evidence of common nationality was the crucial factor for Ramanathan, therefore Tamil speakers "must be adjudged Tamils" (ibid:239), but in deference to the arguments of Sir Edward Tylor that language is only "some proportion of ancestry ...(and)... partial evidence of race" (ibid:239,& ff3), he sought to further justify his conclusions with an examination of the history, social customs and physical features of the Moors. Relying extensively on material from India he outlined his thesis concerning the common history of the Indian Tamils (who converted to Islam) and the Ceylon Moors. He first established an argument about the course of conversion to Islam in India, and its rapidity. This latter part of the argument was directed towards diminishing the numbers of foreign settlers originally required for conversion of a population and thus negating their influence in an assumed subsequent alteration of **material character**. An alteration in material character constituted a critical component in his reasoning.<sup>7</sup> In North India the greatest number of converts (adopting Islam in the Western Punjab in the thirteenth century, and in the Eastern Punjab in the seventeenth century) were low caste Hindus attracted by the ideology of equality

---

<sup>7</sup> The argument took place on grounds which reflected the concerns and the texture of the discourse at the time. They have since been discredited.



preached by the missionaries of the governing race, or the members of opportunist villages who sought to protect their landholdings, and these conversions were attained "without an appreciable admixture of blood with that of foreigners" (ibid:245, my emphasis).

Turning next to the West coast of South India, he observes that the Mappilas attribute their Islamic tradition to the initial shipwreck of an Arab trading ship on the riverine island of Chaliyam in 844AD. (ibid:245),<sup>8</sup> Treated kindly by the Hindu ruler who was interested in trade, they settled and were later followed by other Arabs including a number of missionaries. The Mappilas constituted a new ethnic category in the area (a point Ramanathan ignores), a category composed chiefly of traders from Hadramaut and Yemen who married local women and maintained local matrilineal traditions (Miller, ibid, op cit). Conversion outside of marriage in this case took place predominantly among the fishing castes attracted by the opportunities for sea-faring trade.<sup>9</sup> Later conversions were encouraged by the Muslim Zamorin of Calicut who required seamen to defend the coastal towns against Portuguese colonial incursions. These converts to Islam are argued to have retained their native customs and Malayalam language as indeed he suggests is the case with the Ceylon Moors. The influence of Cheruman Perumal, their Raja, who converted to Islam and retired to Mecca is also held to be a significant 'example' and instrumental in conversion.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See also Miller (1976:41) who notes this tradition but holds that the first Arab colony in India pre-dates the Islamic era which began in 610AD.

<sup>9</sup> "Hindus found an easy refuge from their own stringent caste laws, which debarred them from sea-faring pursuits, in the open arms of Islam" (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, First Edition, Vol VI:247, cited Ramanathan, ibid:245). The declaration of fishing and sea-borne pursuits as polluting arose after a resurgence of Hindu orthodoxy. Forbes (1981:68) cites Bouchon's (1973:9-15) reference to the emergence of Sankara orthodoxy amongst the Malabari Hindu population with the introduction of strict taboos against all forms of maritime activity. See also Boxer (ibid:45).

<sup>10</sup> See Kutty (1972:6) Miller (1976:46-49) Mukundan (1979:59-61) Forbes (1981:68) and Rashid (1986:135-136) for accounts of this conversion. In the Laccadives off the coast of Kerala, live a matrilineal people who were originally Hindus from the Kerala region. The conversion of these islands to Islam is attributed to the same period. In 1545-50 these previously independent islands came under the control of Chirakkal Raja of Malabar and later from 1784-99 were under Tipu Sultan (Rashid, ibid, op cit). See also Chapter Four.

Entirely ignoring the possibility of this early Arab trade reaching the coast of Ceylon at this time, or possibly earlier, Ramanathan links the conversion of Ceylon Moors to the conversion of the "Choliyas" (Lebbes, Coast Moors) in the town of Kayal-pattanam in South India's Tamil Nadu.<sup>11</sup> Kayal-pattanam, originally a flourishing coastal port since silted up, was of great importance in South Indian trade, particularly from the thirteenth century. Host to foreign merchants from many countries and renowned for its trade in horses, Indrapala notes that it was a chief port for trade with Ceylon (1986:118). According to Ramanathan the ancestors of the Ceylon Moors formed their first settlement in 'Kayal-paddanam' in the ninth century and later in 1024 AD a colony from here migrated to 'Berberyn' (Beruwela on Ceylon's South-west coast) and settled there (ibid:247). Concluding from the fact that Beruwela is widely believed to be one of the first sites of Arab settlement on the island, if not the very first site (ibid, op cit) and a tradition in 'Kayal-paddanam' (and Ceylon) that Coast Moor colonists from there migrated to Beruwela, he insists that this therefore dates the arrival of Islam in the island, and, by implication, the beginning of the conversion process.<sup>12</sup> The notion of conversion which he glosses as a "change of manners and customs" (ibid:249), is critical to Ramanathan's reasoning and he argues that

(C)onsidering that not much more than 100 Europeans have laboured in the cause of Christianity at any given period in the island, and have made as many as 250,000 converts during three centuries, it may be concluded that the Egyptians and Arabs who settled at Kayal-paddanam could not have infused their blood among the converts to so great an extent as to materially alter their character... (and)... (H)ence it is that the Choliyas continue to be in point of language, features, physique, and social customs still Tamils in all respects except religion (ibid:249-250).

---

<sup>11</sup> Called Kayal-paddanam by Azeez (ibid).

<sup>12</sup> Indrapala (ibid:118) also cites the existence of this tradition in the island but Azeez denies it (1957:24). Some local informants repeated it and further stated that Kayal-pattanam was a popular pilgrimage site for Muslims engaged in the textile trade. (It was indicated that traders from the research area, from the East coast and from the Pettah were involved, among others.) The Bawas who travelled throughout the island during Ramazan collected **niyaaths** (vows) to take to Kayal-pattanam each year on behalf of others. The tradition need not be the 'whole truth' and the question that is not posed is whether or not Coast Moors from Kayal-pattanam migrated to a Beruwela **that was already a long established site of Arab settlement**. This is entirely possible given the history of Arab and South Indian trading involvement in the area.



By extension, the small number of Arabs claimed by the Muslims to have settled in Ceylon could not possibly have altered their material character, creating a justification for the racial distinction between Ceylon Moors and Tamils, or Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors. Azeez later argues in characteristically rationalist fashion that the early arrival of 100 Arabs would have been sufficient, an early arrival which is totally denied by Ramanathan in favour of the Kayal-paddanam colonisation thesis. The distinction between the Coast Moors and Ceylon Moors arises, Ramanathan argues, from the

cessation of intercourse (...) produced and continued for several decades between the Mother-country (Kayal-paddanam) and her colonies (Beruwela, Batticaloa, Puttalam etc) (ibid:255, brackets mine),

as a result of the advent of the Europeans generally and the particular persecution of the Moor community by the Dutch.

A prevalent tradition among the Muslims is that among the early Arabs, and in some versions the first Arabs to settle in the island, see Johnston (Vol 1,p630,cited ibid:253) were Hashimites, subject to persecution and driven out of Arabia by the tyranny of the Caliph Abd-al-melek Ben Merwan (ibid:251) and who settled in India, Ceylon and Malacca. Eight settlements are held to have been established in Ceylon at Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mantota, Mannar, Coodramale, Puttalam, Colombo, Barbaryn (Beruwela) and Point-de-Galle (Galle). Ramanathan finds these myths of "wholesale Arab colonisation" difficult to conceive as historical fact, and further asks why it is, when they settled in the "purely Sinhalese" districts like Kalutara and Galle "they abandon(ed) both Arabic and Sinhalese and (took) to the Tamil?" (ibid:252). Ramanathan has recourse to the history and literature of the Sinhalese in seeking to further his arguments and notes that the ancient Sinhalese chronicle, the *Mahavamsa* (sixth century) contains no reference to the Moors but that the later seventeenth century chronicle, the *Rajavaliya* records

that a great number of them arrived in 1505 from Kayal-paddanam, and attempted to settle by force at Chilaw, and were beaten back by Dharmma Parakrama Bahu (Upham's translation,p274,cited ibid:253).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Tennant, (in a further elaboration of the 'lazy native' view) writes that the Sinhalese were not traders though K.M.De Silva (1981) suggests otherwise. However, trade was a limited pursuit among the Sinhalese prior to the arrival of the KSD castes from India and conducted largely on behalf of the King. Tennant argues that the Sinhalese desired to escape "from intercourse with the strangers



Two Sinhalese poems, the *Parevi Sandesa* ("Pigeon Message") and the *Kokila Sandesa* (both produced in the reign of Sri Parakrama Bahu, 1410-1461), allude to Beruwela as occupied by "cruel and lawless Bamburas" (barbarians) (ibid:254).<sup>14</sup> Ibn Battuta visited the island in 1344 and travelled from Galle to Colombo, via inland Adam's Peak on a pilgrimage (a route which avoids coastal Beruwela altogether) but his failure to mention Beruwela incites Ramanathan to argue that therefore

we may safely conclude that Beruwala had not been seized upon by the Muhammadans in 1344... (likewise Galle and Puttalam)... and that though Arabs, Egyptians, Abyssinians and other Africans may have constantly come to and gone from Ceylon, as merchants, soldiers, and tourists, long before the fourteenth century, comparatively few of them domiciled themselves in the island: and that the settlement at Beruwala, which the Ceylon Muhammadans generally admit to be the first of all their settlements, took place not earlier than the fourteenth century, say AC 1350. We may also safely conclude that this colony was an offshoot of Kayalpaddanam, and that the

---

resorting to trade on their coasts.. (and this).. serves to explain the singular scantiness of information regarding the interior of the island which is apparent in the writings of Arabians and Persians between the eighth and thirteenth centuries" (*Ceylon*, Vol I, p596, cited Azeez, ibid:12). It would also serve equally well, to explain the lack of information regarding traders in coastal ports, in the Sinhalese chronicles of Kingship.

<sup>14</sup> Obeyesekere (1984) argues that the Bambura is to be taken as a Berber, the term itself not implying a strict linguistic, cultural or geographical connotation (ibid:303). He also refers to an earlier tradition of Bambura dances held in Beruwela. (I note that Beruwela is held to be the **first** site of Arab settlement). This may be related to an annual ritual procession for Hata Bamburu, held by the Sinhalese population of the Weligama area. An enormous and grossly rotund figure in Middle Eastern dress of silk trousers and turban, is taken late at night from Mirissa (which is a small harbour) through to Pelena (by Weligama Bay) along the coastal road. The procession is accompanied by men cracking whips of burnt rope which make a particularly loud sound. Obeyesekere (ibid) notes the appearance of the Bambura in the Sinhalese **gammaduwa** traditions at Matara and Sinigama, both located on the South-west coast. (The **gam maduwa** is "a village ceremonial for the Gods, mainly Pattini" (Kapferer, 1983:279). Pattini in one tradition is believed to have been brought up by Muslim parents. The idea that the Bambura is a 'Berber' is consistent with the opinion of a Sinhalese exorcist from Akuressa who states that Hata Bambura is a Muslim. Obeyesekere further argues that this ritual performance which often engages the miming of shooting incidents, in which the performers dance with sticks is to be interpreted as dealing with Sinhalese psychological castration anxieties. This exercise in Freudian reduction is difficult to sustain in my view and it is more probable that the greatest clue to the significance of the ritual lies in the sheer size of the figure which suggests the wealthy nature of foreign traders and their particular **transformative** skill which was historically demonstrated along this coastal area.



emigrants consisted largely of a rough and ready set of bold Tamil converts, determined to make themselves comfortable by the methods usual among unscrupulous adventurers ... speaking a low Tamil interlaced with Arabic expressions ... and practising after their own fashion the rights (sic) of the Muhammadan faith ... (ibid:254-55).

A challenge indeed, to the Muslim community of the time, one which struck at the heart of their own conception of their history and ethnological background.

The other two areas in which Ramanathan sought to argue that the Moors were Tamils were on the grounds of their social customs and physical features. The marriage customs of the Moors, the subject of an 1888 Royal Asiatic Society paper by Ahamadu Bawa, feature elements borrowed from the Tamils (a point never denied by the Moors) and distinct from those of the law of the Prophet. However as I will discuss below, an examination of the Muslim marriage ritual, including those elements borrowed from the Tamils, reveals that *in toto*, it stands as a 'rite of conversion', one in which the relations between 'Islamic men' and 'local women', are governed by an overarching and determining Islamic ideology, which itself is re-ordering, and constitutes the establishment, in each and every case, of a new **Muslim** family. This interpretation denies to a large extent, the dichotomy suggested by Ramanathan between the 'pure' marriage laws of the Prophet and the 'impure' or non-orthodox inclusion of Tamil elements in the Muslim marriage and further, any rendering of these marriages as non-Islamic, and the community by extension, as non-Arab.<sup>15</sup>

Ramanathan's final point was to refer to the question of the physical appearance of the Moors, a field in which these days racial and physical characteristics have been discredited as possible determinants of ethnicity in favour of arguments which are based on

---

<sup>15</sup> The 'impurity' he infers however is a community concern. The structure of relations in the Muslim community of the South-west, with a patrilineal ideology of descent, and greater moral authority of men inherent in Islamic ideology, determines that men and Islam stand in a dominant and incorporative relation to women. The fact that the women historically (and sometimes presently) converted to Islam however, coupled with the practice of matrilocal residence, means that they stand in a position of constant **threat** to the purity of Islamic men. A constant dynamism is borne of this structure - with men constantly purifying the community and women constantly (potentially) threatening it, or at least rendering continual re-assertion of Islamic values necessary. This issue is dealt with at length below and I do not take it up here.

local ideological positions. Ramanathan, who favours language as the only safe determinant of ethnicity also felt this to be a fruitless line of argument and takes up the question only in deference to the arguments of Tylor. In any event, he concludes that there is insufficient scientific evidence to establish that the Moors are other than Tamil or Sinhalese and none to establish that they are of Arab extraction.

The published response to this paper, *A Criticism of Mr Ramanathan's "Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon"* written by I.L.M.Abdul Azeez was published under the auspices of the Moors Union in Colombo in 1907. We may assume, and contemporary evidence supports this, that his reply represents an accurate portrayal of the prevailing Muslim ideology concerning their history at the time. Samaraweera points out that the printed discourse of the time had a limited readership (1986:373). Ramanathan's argument is refuted carefully point by point, in exactly the same terms in which it was initially presented. A critical evaluation of the evidence, and the argument refuted in similar rational and common-sense terms. These terms, and the structure of the rhetoric, were, it is true, part of the wider political discourse of the period, one in which the British were concerned to grant suffrage, on a proportional and communal basis.<sup>16</sup> Further, this discourse was one whose structure later manifested the increasing concern with language which resulted in the Sinhala Only Language Act of 1956, introduced by the Sinhala nationalist S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. However, the argument, produced by Ramanathan and later refuted by Azeez in these rationalist terms, obscures the greater import of the case for the Arab ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon, that of its symbolic value. The real concern in this context is with the religious significance of ethnicity.

Ramanathan argues that the term Moors was applied by the Portuguese to the Muslims of Ceylon and has a **religious** meaning. He means that it was no more than an appellation applied because of their religion. But Azeez rejects this outright, stating that the term, as applied by the Portuguese, and in its current usage, refers to Arabs and

---

<sup>16</sup> Universal adult suffrage was not granted until 1931 as a result of the report of the Donoughmore Commissioners (K.M.De Silva, 1981:422).



their descendents as a racial category.<sup>17</sup> Further Azeez argues that distinctions have always existed between Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors. Ramanathan takes the position that religion does not signify race, whereas Azeez asserts the non-separation of the two. Arab origins for Azeez are of vital religious import and he takes what is symbolic to be real. He is firmly embedded however, in this ideology, and unfortunately the religious value of Arab ethnicity is nowhere explicitly discussed.

Ramanathan's Kayal-pattanam colonisation thesis must be taken as discredited. Azeez cites numerous references to earlier Arab settlement and not simply temporary residence in the island.

Arunchalam states that

(F)rom the tenth to the fifteenth century the Arabs were the undisputed masters of the Eastern seas and trade, and exercised great influence in Ceylon till ousted by the Portuguese. During this period they settled on the Indian and Ceylon coasts, and intermarried largely with the natives, especially the Tamils (Census of 1901, par 34 Ch 10, cited Azeez, ibid:9).

Tennant states that the Arabs were known as traders in Ceylon "centuries before Mahomet was born" (ibid:630). Further that the

author of the *Periplus* found them in Ceylon about the first century, Cosmos Indico-pleistes in the sixth: and (that) they had become so numerous in China in the eight (sic) as to cause a tumult in Canton" (ibid, op cit).<sup>18,19</sup>

Samaraweera (1979:244) argues that it is possible to write of them as a settled community only from the twelfth century, their transient nature being linked to their trading activity but significantly he also pre-dates Ramanathan's 'fourteenth century' thesis. Those Muslims who arrived from Kayal-pattanam to settle in Beruwela then, must have come to what was already a long-established port of trade and site of Arab settlement. Beruwela stands at the symbolic heart

---

<sup>17</sup> See also Tennant (ibid:169).

<sup>18</sup> On this latter point see Forbes (1981:62, ff32) who states that the "massacre of the Cantonese Arabo-Persian community in 878 AD (...) destroyed the basis of the sea-borne Muslim community in China (120,000 Muslims and other foreigners are said to have perished) and ensured the primacy of the Central Asian link between China and Islam." As a result the Hui Muslim community is predominantly Hanafi and not Shafi (see also Gladney, 1991:100).

<sup>19</sup> See also Miller (ibid:40) Mauroof (1990:170) Hussainmiya (ibid:289) Forbes (1981:66-67) for references to the settlement of Arabs from the first to the seventh centuries.

of Islam in the island, particularly in the South-west, where it is held to be the very first port of **arrival** of Arabs in the island. The name Beruwela is generally believed to mean "sails down".<sup>20</sup>

To deny at a stroke, the Arab ancestry of the Moor population, and the original status of Beruwela as a site of Arab settlement, claiming rather that it was colonised by converted Hindus in the fourteenth century was an attack of such proportions that, the later reply, actually sharpened the division between myth and history and sedimented even more strongly the acceptance as historical fact of what had once, been more widely regarded as a fiction. In certain respects one effect of this was to make myth indeed reality, and to expand its significance and applicability to the Muslims as a whole. Traditions are factual in Azeez's interpretation and unfortunately, the symbolic value of this history, (real or mythical) is not made grounds for any discussion. The debate is conducted solely in

---

<sup>20</sup> The symbolic importance attached to Beruwela as a point of **origination** of Arabs, and Islam, in the island is borne out in contemporary ritual practice. The annual feast at the Beruwela Buhary Mosque, located on the sea-front at Beruwela, is subject to the most stringent rules of conduct that I encountered. Rules which it could be argued, reflect its orthodox and original purity. In particular, and in radical contrast to the practice elsewhere, the recitation of the **nowlood** (story of the Prophet or saint, in this case "Buhari Muslim" a book of sayings by Muhammad), is not broadcast outside the mosque. It is believed that only those who are inside the mosque should participate. This reveals an exclusivist dimension in the religious ritual practice of this egalitarian community. An exclusivity which shares a logic with the practices of Mecca (another point of origination), where non-Muslims are excluded also. The fact that Beruwela, was a point of origin, may also be significant in the Kayal-pattanam myth, that they migrated to the site of Arab origination in the island, but this remains conjectural. It does share a logic with the beliefs around Saint s'shrines however as will be seen in the next chapter. This coastal area also has significance for Sinhalese in similar myths of origination, in particular the arrival of Devol Deviyo, a deity who arrived with Muslim traders and merchants from South India and was shipwrecked here, but landed at nearby Panadura (Neville, 1954, Vol.I:6, cited Kapferer, 1983:258). In a South-coast Muslim version of this myth I was told that accompanying Devol Deviyo on this ordinary journey were seven people of each of seven tribes, travelling in seven ships. Among them were seven Muslims from each of the following groups. The **Yon** (sailing traders), **Lai Bandar** (from the Karachi coast), **Marikkars** (Mappilas from the Kerala coast), and **Mukaru** (Muslim gem miners). Here again there is an explicit theme in the mythic tradition which **unifies** an **original** diversity. Today Beruwela is the site of the recently established (1973) Jamiah Naleemiah, endowed by Al-Haj Nalim and established as an Institute of Muslim Studies. Its location must be interpreted in line with the symbolic purity and original status of Beruwela itself.



rational, historical and ethnic/racial terms. The only allusion to the power and depth of the attack lies in Azeez's statement

that there is nothing humiliating in being Tamil in race (but) the persistent attempt... ( )... in attributing to the Moors an origin which they do not claim, in spite of their assertion to the contrary, is annoying, if not offending... (Azeez, *ibid*, ii)<sup>21</sup>

In reply to the assertion that the Tamil language is indicative of the Tamil nationality of the Moors, Azeez points out that the Tamil language of the Ceylon Moors is a borrowed language. It is not their national language and it therefore cannot be argued to establish their Tamil origins in the manner in which the common Tamil language of low or high caste Hindus, or the common Sinhala of Low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese establishes them, distinct cultural and ritual practices notwithstanding, as belonging in each case to one race (*ibid*:11). Tamil became the lingua-franca of Indian Ocean trade after the Chola period in which Indian Muslims assumed a dominant role. When the Arabs settled, even in the predominantly Sinhalese areas of the South-west, they traded with Tamil traders and married **their** women. In time they came to speak the language of their "Malabar wives" and forgot their own (*ibid*:13-14). Azeez draws a parallel case between the Moors of Sri Lanka and the Parsees of India. The Parsees are the descendents of a group of Persians who migrated to Gujerat, and yet, their Gujerati language aside, they are accepted as a community of Persian descent. Neither the Parsees nor the Moors, or for that matter, the Dutch Burghers of Ceylon, speak the language of their ancestors, and in no case, should this be taken to deny their ancestry.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> A later statement by Sir Razik Fareed was more trenchant. He accused the Tamil community of "stretching its treacherous tentacles and annihilating a race with history, culture and religion of its own" (Mohan, 1987:30). He stated that the Ceylon Moors were "the proud progeny of an heroic race - the Arabs" and the idea that they were Muslim Tamils was the result of Ramanathan's "sordid imagination" and further that the Moor members of the Parliament would "fight to our last cent, the last drop of our blood and our last breath (...) to counter this falsehood (that we are Tamil converts)" (*ibid*, *op cit*).

<sup>22</sup> A point made by George Wall, as chairman of the Royal Asiatic Society Meeting at which Ramanathan's paper was read. "... (I) f we are to accept (Max Muller's) definition in its simplicity and without qualification, we must regard the Parsees as Indians and not as a separate nationality..." (*ibid*:15).

### 3.3 The ideology of descent.

A further aspect of the argument which has not been taken up explicitly in this debate and subsequent analysis, though it remains implicit throughout, is the ideology of descent. Both Ramanathan and Azeez rely on an 'ideology of descent' as a fundamental component of their reasoning. But in both cases these different ideologies (one Tamil and one Muslim) are embedded, and remain unquestioned, unconsidered and implicit. As a direct consequence of this, the greatest source of distinction in the two arguments also remains unexamined. In Ramanathan's view, a few Arabs married into an Indian Tamil or Malabar community, adopted their language and some of their customs and merely changed their religion to Islam. In essence, the community remained basically Tamil or Malabar, the result of a religious conversion which did not (and in his terms could not) significantly alter the "material character" of the converting (Malabar or East Coast Tamil) matrilineal community. On the contrary, in the arguments of Azeez, the patrilineal ideology of Islam leads him to understand, and the Ceylon Moor community also, that the children of Arab men who converted and married local women were of **Arab** descent. In essence these conversions and marriages established by Arab men gave rise to a new racial/ethnic category, that of Ceylon Moors. This ideology of the transmission of blood through the male line, retains all its force in the community today. In the Southwest of the island this ideology is found in patrilineal communities in conjunction with a system of dual unilineal inheritance of property and matrilocal residence.<sup>23</sup> The situation of the matrilineal Muslim communities of Sri Lanka's East Coast may seem initially to prove a contradiction to the wide acceptance of a patrilineal Islamic ideology. However, with a few qualifications this situation in fact strengthens rather than weakens my argument. On the East Coast, descent is determined through the matrilineal line and the Muslim community, like the adjacent Hindu community is a society composed of a number of matrilineal clans - **kuti**.<sup>24</sup> However, concerning those aspects of inheritance in which specifically religious ideologies are

---

<sup>23</sup> Household property is passed through the female line as dowry and business property passes from father to son. This distinction in property has been referred to as Friday Property (male) and Monday property (female), (McGilvray, 1973:9 see also Dube, 1969).

<sup>24</sup> The number of **kuti** s, 18 for Hindus and 7 for Muslims, itself reflects a different religious ideology (McGilvray, *ibid*:9).



engaged, the East Coast Muslims follow patrilineal rules of determination. Thus in the case of the Moulanas (descendents of the Prophet traced patrilineally from his daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali) for instance, in which Moulana status travels in the male line, on the East Coast also, it is descent in the patriline which remains the critical factor.<sup>25</sup> So we clearly have a situation in which the Ceylon Moors understand themselves to be a particular ethnic category - Arab descendants, borne of the union of Arab men and local Tamil (or Sinhalese) women. This is entirely at odds with Ramanathan's perception of 'Tamil in race, Mahommadan in religion', and should not be reduced either, to the 'Indo-Arab' ethnic composition used by K.M.De Silva (1981:91). What we are alerted to, beyond the application of two different ideologies of descent applied by Ramanathan and Azeez is rather a further dimension to the Muslim side of the argument whereby a new ethnic group is **created** through the **marriage and conversion of local women by Arab traders**. Religion in this cultural context must be understood as a fully engaged,

---

<sup>25</sup> The **Thangals**, (the Malayalam equivalent of the Arabic Seyyid, Sri Lankan Moulana), found in the Laccadives, also exhibit this ideology. The Laccadives, although entirely Muslim are a converted Malabari Hindu population, with a three tiered caste structure, and matrilineal inheritance governed by **marumakkathayam** laws. However "... the powerful religious associations of the (high-caste Thangal) family with patrilineal Islam are considered to over-rule marumakkathayam and ..(they) .. operate on a strictly patrilineal basis in accordance with the established precepts of **sharia** law" (Forbes, 1978:193-198). (For further discussion of the contradictions raised by a patrilineal Islamic ideology in this matrilineal context see Dube, *ibid*).

The Bawas on the East Coast of Sri Lanka raise a further interesting application of the ideologies of descent. They are a group of religious mendicants chiefly inhabiting the areas of Eravur and Kalmunai near Batticaloa. It is possible to either be born a Bawa or to become one by attaching oneself to a teacher for a long period of time and taking instruction from him. In either case a very specific ritual of death and re-birth is required for initiation into the order and Bawas are Sufis, who are in essence the 'living dead' (see also Chapter Four). To have a father who was a Bawa renders one a Bawa, but it is not clear whether or not a son will automatically choose to pursue the life of a mendicant. The Islamic idea of **silsila** or 'chain of grace', is pertinent here. The '**baraka**' (grace) may be either transmitted with a physical dimension through the blood from a father to his son, or in a line of teachings from one saint to another. Informants state that Bawa blood may provide a certain aptitude or pre-disposition towards an understanding of the teachings, but alternatively such awareness or grace can be developed within the self. This is the egalitarian possibility of Islam. The ideology of **self-transformation**, inherent in the rituals of death and re-birth, arises through the context of the ritual itself and stands outside the ideology of blood lines.

ideologically determining, culturally shaping factor. It has a value in a distinctive and enabling manner. Islam is far more than simply an adopted religion, it is entirely and powerfully transformative.

The status given to various arguments on each side is also different in one other respect. While Ramanathan relies on language as the fundamental determinant of nationality, for the Moors their Tamil language is simply a borrowed one. There remains of course the problem of the Moors continually embedding themselves in another language, and this is one they implicitly recognise. They are consistently cognisant of the fact that they are not Arabic speakers by birth, and this lack of facility with the language of their religion, constantly reminds them that they remain a peripheral community. There have been numerous religious writings in Tamil, largely generated in the Indian context, and the development of Arabic-Tamil (Arabic written in Tamil script) which Mauroof believes to be "the true language of Sri Lankan Muslims" (1972:68), though no longer much in evidence, should not be overlooked.<sup>26</sup>

Condensed within the ideological statement that Ceylon Moors are the descendents of Arab traders who converted and married local women are three points which are worthy of note, for they have a significance well beyond any immediate historical truth. At an immediate historical level they do not explain the arrival in the island of the disparate groups of Muslims that together constitute the Muslim community. At the ideological level however, they are highly pertinent in the internal ordering of the community. Their significance is to be determined through a consideration of their meaning within a peripheral Muslim community which understands itself as Islamic. Thus their meaning must be sought in the 'structures of significance' internal to the community itself, through an examination of a particular cosmological schema in which Sri Lankan Muslims are located, and through which they apprehend and experience their world. First, the point of **origin of Islam** itself - Arabia, is revealed. Secondly, the manner of transmission of the religion by

---

<sup>26</sup> In Androth Island in the Laccadives, the religious centre of the island complex where several of the Thangal families claim Arab ancestry, the native Malayalam language is written by the Mappilas (Moppilas) in an Arabic script. This marks them as distinct from the Mappila mainlanders who use a Malayali script (Forbes, 1981:82). Rashid (ibid:35) argues that these days the Malayali script is becoming more common.



traders is clearly signed, and thirdly, the way in which the religious community within the island was created through the marriage of Arab men to local women is implicit. All three points are integral to the history of the religion and the religious community within the island. The ideology increasingly negates original diversity in a manner which is consistent with the principles of egalitarianism itself. It is an ideology which signs the community as religious, unequivocally.

Part of the legitimating force of this ideology can be seen today in the structure of internal domination of the Muslim community by the Muslim traders of the South-west coast who declare themselves to be of Arab descent. Those Muslims on the East coast, more densely concentrated, and generally engaged in agriculture and fishing, are a much lesser force within the Muslim community, and the Eastern Province as a whole may only be regarded as an emerging economic region.<sup>27</sup> It has been suggested (Gunasinghe, p.c.) that in order to challenge successfully, the current dominance of the Muslim community, those on the East Coast will have to 'purify' themselves through a new fundamentalism.<sup>28</sup> Despite the existence of one

---

<sup>27</sup> Early historical references to the period of Dry Zone civilizations suggest that there were at least thriving trade routes adjacent to these predominantly agricultural communities and that Trincomalee was a major site of trade with Bengal. The collapse of the Dry Zone civilizations and the subsequent drift to the South-west reduced the importance of this area as a trading centre. Currently the Eastern Province is one of the sites of massive Sinhalese government resettlement schemes, perceived by the Tamils as a deliberate attempt to significantly alter the ethnic balance of the region, and this has certainly been their effect. "In part, the settlement plan draws inspiration (...) from the highly controversial Israeli project in the West Bank (and) the demographic changes (have) a "counter-insurgency" or strategic component. The main objective is to undermine the theory of "Traditional homelands" and to isolate the Jaffna peninsula" *Lanka Guardian*, Vol 7 , nos 23 & 24, April 1, 1985:1.

<sup>28</sup> I note from a brief visit to Kalmunai on the East Coast in 1985 that many new mosques were at that time under construction, or had been recently completed. Some it seemed were built with funds donated by the Middle East and others by an emerging class of business entrepreneurs, or with the help of remittances from local Muslims employed in the Middle East. As part of the resettlement schemes referred to above there has been announced an extensive project of Buddhist dagoba (*stupa*) restoration thus underlining that these areas are claimed as having once been Buddhist. Kapferer terms this "a Sinhalese government concern to distribute the icons of Buddhist dominance" (1988:38). In line with this staking of territorial rights through the restoration and reconstruction of religious structures, the building of mosques in the area, with its

tradition which traces a Muslim presence in the region to those expelled from the South-west coast, the majority of Muslims here trace their presence to the arrival of Indian Muslims. Given the ideology of descent that I have outlined above, there is a sense in which Indian Muslims who converted populations on the East Coast through marriage, although they are Ceylon Moors, stand as less 'ethnically pure' than the Ceylon Moors of the South-west whose Arab connections are more direct. This situation is no doubt reinforced by the greater focus on matrilineality which remains within these populations while those on the South-west coast are unambiguously patrilineal. The entire native population of the Southern and Western littoral was at a much earlier period, the subject of attempts at colonial law reform and Yalman (ibid) has noted structural transformations in kinship ideology which occurred as a result.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the movement towards the establishment of a "Muslim" identity in Sri Lanka, began in earnest with the arrival of the Portuguese and the colonial era. Each colonial power adopted a different policy towards the Muslims and their fortunes during this period, shifted more radically than those of any other group. The Portuguese came as both religious adversaries and trading rivals, while the Dutch despised them, subjected them to heavy taxation and banned their settlement within the urban areas. The British, on the other hand, rather favoured them. The nationalist and revivalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which progressively consumed Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims as a prelude to the granting of Independence in 1948, marked the final articulation of an explicit ideology of Arabic descent. An ideology which was legitimated by its enshrinement in Hansard in the context of pre-Independence British determination of new structures of access to political power. A determination which was moreover explicitly communalist.<sup>29</sup> It was within this historical context that

---

rapidly shifting ethnic balance, has an added significance.

<sup>29</sup> A problem similar to that of the Moors arose for the Burgher community in this context of prevailing popular ideologies concerning "racial" descent. The British didn't recognize the internal distinctions between the Portuguese and Dutch Burghers and had reserved only one seat for a political representative of the Burgher community. This seat had invariably been held by a Burgher drawn from the "Dutch Burgher Civic elite of Colombo and Galle" (McGilvray, 1983:246). With the proposed changes to the Legislative Council in the Constitutional Reforms of 1910 "ethnic representation (...) would soon become a matter of democratic choice within



their current political position which is predominantly 'opportunistic' (Mohan,1987:5&32) was created. Historically they were always a flexible community, subject to the vagaries of internecine disputes between the island's early Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms, peripherally involved and always seeking to trade. Their current position however derives from more than a simple economic pragmatism, born of an acute minority status in most electorates. What is more in evidence is a perception of themselves as a 'beleaguered' community, always on the periphery. It is the condensation of this historical complexity into simple and forceful ideological statements which has been my concern. An exploration of the historical process of development of an ideology which in its current distillation asserts, that it is the place of origin of the religion, Arabia, which determines the origin of the people.

### 3.4 A trading community.

The Muslim community in Sri Lanka is consistently represented as a trading community. This is both a common perception of other religious groups and a representation of the community promulgated by the Muslims themselves. However most of the Muslims are not currently, nor have they ever been, traders. This therefore raises an immediate question concerning what is essentially, an **ideology of trade**. This ideology which presents the Muslims as traders and which continues to structure much of their political engagement in the island condenses a complex of ideas. The most immediate is that of the association of Islam with the 'Arab' traders who first brought the religion to the island. These traders plied the trade routes of the Indian Ocean for centuries and settled in colonies all along the Western coasts of India and Ceylon(Forbes,1981:66-67). Informants in Sri Lanka believe that these settlements were converted to Islam shortly after its rapid rise in the Middle East, but published historical sources are mute on this point. In spite of the paucity of research on this community, scholars have noted the importance of the Muslim community owing to the "dominant position they have

---

officially demarcated (i.e. ethnically defined) electorates" (ibid:247). This made it likely that the more numerous, lower class Portuguese Burghers would easily outvote the Dutch Burgher elite. As a result the Dutch Burghers lobbied extensively for a restricted electorate, claiming that they were the only true Burghers with a distinct "Northern European racial identity" which was traceable only through a direct male line of descent (ibid, op cit).

traditionally held in trade and commerce" (Samaraweera, 1978:466).<sup>30</sup> This dominant position has waned considerably in recent times but the representation and perception of, the community as one of traders still persists. Historically this dominant role was restricted to a fraction within the community, chiefly those living in the commercial regions of the island's South-west coast, and to a lesser extent small enclaves at the major coastal ports of Puttalam and Mannar on the West coast, Trincomalee on the East coast, and Jaffna in the North. Another significant group were those living in the central highlands near Kandy, a site which gained particular importance during the Portuguese and Dutch colonial periods when the Kandyan Kingdom remained free of colonial control. In this context it continued to provide an area of free trade and became a place of refuge for the island's Muslims who were subject to particular harassment because their trading role was in direct conflict with colonial intentions. The largest concentrations of Muslims however are to be found in the agricultural regions of the Eastern Province and the greatest number of them are not traders but impoverished agriculturalists.<sup>31</sup> (In Amparai District they constitute 46.2% of the population, in Batticaloa 24.2% and in Trincomalee 24.2%, 1971 Census, cited Mauroof 1990:173)<sup>32</sup> Even in the purely urban areas the majority of Muslims are poor and unemployed, and of those who are traders, most are engaged in petty trade (Mauroof, ibid:176-77).

---

<sup>30</sup> See also Kulasuriya (1976:150) and C.R. De Silva (1986:152).

<sup>31</sup> A figure of 94% belonging to the farming community was cited by a prominent Muslim in the *Daily News* 2/2/85.

<sup>32</sup> Mohan (1985) argues that during the Portuguese period many Muslims were forced to flee from the South-west coast and among them at least 4000 fled to the Kandyan Kingdom and were settled in fertile lands around Batticaloa on the island's East coast (ibid:17). Some informants state that the Muslims of the E.P. were traditionally traders before the colonial period and that they were **reduced** to farming. This cannot be argued to apply to more than a minority of E.P. Muslims, and other traditions support the view that many more Muslims simply moved, with their trade, away from ports under direct colonial control. In other cases Muslims sought to negotiate with the new colonial rulers. The bulk of the E.P. Muslim community are converted Hindus. Yalman (1971) recounts a myth of "seven wily Indian Muslims" who arrived to assist local rulers in battle and who later settled on the East coast, taking wives rather than land, since they knew that the women would bring land with them (ibid:282-283, see also McGilvray 1982). What is significant about Mohan's argument however is that it is a further reflection of the "trading" ideology of the community, one which is here given a particular historical interpretation, that in part perhaps, seeks to deny a Hindu past.



This representation of the Sri Lankan Muslims as a trading community in a readily apparent contrast to the social reality has been questioned by Mauroof (1990,1980,1972) and Samaraweera (1979:245). Mauroof is concerned to dispel the myths and uncover the true economic position of the Muslims within the wider Indian and Sri Lankan region, arguing that

labels and classifications ... tend to conceal rather than reveal the realities of the harsh and cruel objective conditions that Muslims have to find their survival in (1990:167)<sup>33</sup>

This is a problem inherent in the social situation in Sri Lanka where the widespread perception of the Muslims as a wealthy community (particularly by the Sinhalese in the South) rather than as a community which has a wealthy fraction within it, has considerable political implications. In the recent political context where economic issues have been subordinated to a struggle taking place on ethnic lines between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, such mis-perceptions are very powerful and potentially dangerous.<sup>34</sup>

Mauroof observes the prevalence of the association of Muslims with the occupation of trade citing a common Tamil proverb found in coastal and inland communities, amongst both merchants and peasants - "Sail the deep oceans if you have to and seek the wealth" (1990:170). This association he argues, is an enduring consequence of the ancient Arab maritime link with the Muslim communities but

---

<sup>33</sup> Appreciation of Mauroof's genuine concern for the plight of his countrymen must be tempered with the knowledge that these articles are published in the *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, established in Jeddah and with particular ideological concerns. His general comment "that in the urban areas (...) the majority of Muslims are poor and unemployed" (ibid:177) is not entirely in line with my observations nor as simple as he might suggest. His own view is perhaps a particularly urban one and certainly in Colombo there are huge Muslim slums in Maligawatte and Maradana (shared with other communities also). In the urban areas of Weligama for instance, where widespread unemployment did occur in both the Muslim and Sinhalese communities, it followed "caste" lines, an aspect not evident in his argument, perhaps for ideological reasons.

<sup>34</sup> In the research area, some informants expressed the view that when the Sinhalese had dealt with the Tamil "problem", then it would be their turn. It is possible that the Muslims here indicate that they implicitly recognize the logic of the Sinhalese Buddhist hierarchical state, in demonic encompassing mode, which as Kapferer (1988) has argued is a determining factor in the current ethnic struggle. Alternatively they may perceive the struggle in more simple communalist terms in which they as non-Sinhalese are interpreted as outsiders.

beyond noting that the idea of trade is influential in the community in "innumerable ways" (ibid, op cit) he does not extend our analysis at all.

The representation of Muslims as traders has also been observed in the South Indian context (Tamil Nadu) by Mines (1972).<sup>35</sup> All of the Muslim groups that he surveyed in the town of Pallavaram claimed "merchant" as their primary occupation. Mines was primarily engaged in an exploration of

the interrelationship that exists between the Muslim Tamil's economic behaviour and their beliefs, values, aspirations and social structure (1972:6).

In short he sought to discover what, in this social world, it meant to be a merchant. He established a close link between Islamic religious values and the behaviour of Tamil Muslims as businessmen and posited a contrasting ethos between Tamilian Hindu and Muslim traders. Mines argued that

a Hindu would seek satisfaction and fulfillment in a state bureaucratic career while a Muslim would seek the same in a business career (ibid:62-65).

In particular the Muslims felt that "conducting business is a **sunnath** (a custom of the Prophet's) and is, therefore, an occupation conveying religious merit (ibid:83). The contrast in ethos reflects the different values which Hindus and Muslims hold and has possible implications for their future development possibilities. The Islamic ethos of the Muslims is argued to have an inhibiting effect on their move towards industrialisation. Their insistence upon individualism and equalitarian values leads them to reject the corporate activity necessary for industrialisation. Their business practices favour the employment of kin, rather than non-related but professional managers and technicians essential for development.

Muslim Tamils are distrustful of purely contractual business relationships. They do not feel that the simplex nature of contractual bonds, based as they are solely on monetary ties, are sufficient to keep employees loyal and trustworthy (ibid:110-11).

In most cases when a young unrelated, male employee is taken on, he will be invited to live in his employer's home as a member of the family while he learns the business. This relationship may then be cemented by a marriage to the employer's daughter. The Tamil Muslim

---

<sup>35</sup> "The Tamil Muslims are the offspring of Arab traders and local converts" (Mines, 1975:405).



employee also will seek a position in which he retains his individuality, here expressed through his incorporation into the family of the merchant, in preference to a subordinate position in a larger hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation. This contrast in ethos borne of different underlying values is reflected in other aspects of social life as well. While Hindus (and Jains) aspire to educate their sons and have them enter high-prestige professions the Muslims are less interested in education and aspire to become successful merchants (ibid:107). "Employment is viewed as the only training needed" (ibid:110). A further contrast exists in the fact that the Muslims are a highly mobile and urban population without rural roots and they would rather re-invest in their businesses than buy agricultural land, while the Hindus, whose status structure is still based on land ownership, would prefer to buy land which has a high economic and status value. Hindus are often more tied to a region because of their attachment to local deities and family gods, a factor which explains in part their lower mobility and the higher value they place on the land. The Tamil Muslims also are likely to have a more universalistic world view than the Hindus. This enables them to fit into "any social setting where they find their fellows and a mosque" (ibid:98) and they achieve their status by virtue of their economic success, among their neighbours and kin.

The contrast in ethos between Tamilian Hindu and Muslim merchants discussed by Mines bears some relation to a similar comparative contrast drawn by Muslims in the research area, between the business practices of their own community and those of the Tamil business community. In particular they refer to their own tendency to divert capital from a family business in the event of a son's marriage. Often a son who marries a Muslim woman in another town or village, is given funds to establish a new business of his own. In contrast, they see the Tamils as always consolidating a family business, with sons joining the firm, often in an initially subordinate position. Thus the pursuit of further educational, and often distinctly professional qualifications by a Tamil Hindu son (as an accountant, lawyer, etc) serves to continually increase the commercial expertise of the family business, and further, its commercial viability is not threatened by a continual generational drain on its accumulated and

available capital.<sup>36</sup> A similar pattern of views is evident in the respective communities' regard for education. In Sri Lanka as in Tamil Nadu the Hindus have always sought to pursue education whenever possible in order to acquire higher status, while the Muslim business community have argued

that as trade in itself was a means of accumulation of wealth, which, in turn, led to ascendancy in society, lack of education did not matter much (Mohan, 1985:28).

The contrast in business practices and attitudes to education is clear in both cultural contexts. In Sri Lanka however this reflects both a contrast in ethos and at a fundamental level, distinct marriage and residence practices. In Hindu families where post-marital residence is virilocal (apart from the East Coast), sons remain at home and are available for incorporation into a family business run on patrilineal lines. In Muslim families in Sri Lanka where all post-marital residence is matrilineal (in both the patrilineal communities of the South-west and the matrilineal communities of the East Coast), sons are constantly relocated in the homes, towns or villages of their wives. In Tamil Nadu both Tamilian Muslims and Hindus prefer to marry people from the same locality and both groups move with their families to take up employment if the need arises. (The non-Tamil Muslims in Pallavaram (Pathans and Moppilahs) are generally there alone having left their families in North India and Kerala respectively). Mines examines the link between Islamic religious values and the behaviour of Muslims as businessmen and finds that their behaviour is indeed a rational response to their business environment. Given their commitment to egalitarian and individual working conditions, the structure of the bazaar credit system and their tendency to re-invest in business rather than diversify their capital, it is only the top traders who are in a position to risk the capital required for long term capital intensive industrial production.

Mines' study is a broad application of the Weberian paradigm with a concern to avoid 'blanket statements' through detailed ethnographic work. A greater focus on ethos however would have been in order. The religious value of 'egalitarianism' and the regular participation in egalitarian religious practice are given considerable weight in

---

<sup>36</sup> My information in this regard is limited, particularly with relation to the Tamil community, but at a purely observational level within the research area these statements appear to be supported for the middle and upper income groups.



his analysis as factors which structure Muslim economic behaviour. The dis-proportionate numbers of Muslims who are merchants (rather than bureaucrats for example) is linked to the value Muslims place on egalitarianism - preferring to work either as individuals or for other Muslims thus avoiding the hierarchical structure of a Tamil Hindu firm. But beyond acknowledging that trading is a valued activity because the Prophet was a merchant, Mines does not examine the meaning of being a trader in religious terms. Despite his care he actually assumes an economic 'rationality' untempered by the religious value of **representing** oneself as a trader.

Were we to consider the value placed by the Muslim community on trading as opposed to alternative pursuits, then it is indeed the case that Sri Lankan Muslims as do the Muslim merchants Mines observed, express a definite interest in the pursuit of trade. In the Sri Lankan context I would argue that it is clearly important to represent oneself as a trader.<sup>37</sup> The link between Muslims and trade and the stereotype of Muslims as traders in Sri Lanka however is an ideological one, not to be reduced to ethos (Mines) or a representation which belies sociological facts (Mauroof). The ideology of Muslims as traders is borne of particular historical circumstances which lead Muslims to find an explicitly religious value in the activity of trade, and which **render the merchant himself a religious figure**. The significance of trade is not simply to be found in a religious value attached to its practice - to trade is **sunnath** because the Prophet was a merchant, but more significantly because to be a merchant establishes a direct historical link to the traders of Arabia who brought Islam to Ceylon. This historical dimension is missing entirely from Mines' argument, yet I am convinced that the argument applies there also.<sup>38</sup> He notes that those

---

<sup>37</sup> One informant, with a university degree and employed in the teaching profession explained that this activity was not entirely legitimate and he felt he had to pursue and develop some interest in business as well. As a general rule it seemed that wherever possible the men of a family would attempt to engage in petty trade in addition to other occupations. See Appendix C for a detailed discussion of the Muslim dominance of trade in the research area.

<sup>38</sup> Forbes (1981:55-92) also ignores aspects of the historical argument. He details the extensive historical links between Southern Arabia and the Laccadive and Maldivé religious communities with particular reference to the early introduction of the Shafi madhhab. The symbolic significance however, of Arab legitimacy in the genealogical links between the Laccadive Thangal (Seyyed) families and Hadramaut eludes him entirely.

Non-Tamil Muslim groups (Pathans and Moppilahs) who claim a slightly longer Islamic ancestry, are ranked higher, but that this ranking does not perceptibly affect interaction (ibid:26). It does however suggest a shared set of values in which perceived connections to the Middle East are critical.

As I have suggested, a great deal of the significance of the value of trade is historically located in the arrival of Islam in Ceylon with Arab traders. This gives trade an **originary** significance in this context. Traders are pure Muslims. There is an ideology of particularly Arab traders, in which both Arab origins and trading itself, have great and current significance. This significance although undoubtedly part and parcel of Islamic practice on the island, particularly in those coastal trading communities, gained new meaning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was during this period under British rule that this ideology of Muslims as the descendants of Arab traders was explicitly engaged by the Muslim community in the pursuit of essentially class interests. The employment of this particular ideology, and a re-interpretation of Muslim history on the island, elevated and gave new meaning to the role of the Arab trader, a meaning which was increasingly sedimented during the period of what Roberts (1982) has called - national elite formation. This period of transformation within the island saw for the first time, the construction of national rather than local, elites. This transformation paved the way, within the Muslim community for the establishment of hegemonic domination by the Muslim elite. Their dominance was in the first instance economic but more importantly was now legitimated by the enshrinement in a new form, of a particular **religious** interpretation of the significance, and by extension rightful dominance, of Arab traders and their descendants. This ideology has always served the interests of the dominant fraction within the Muslim community, those on the South-west coast. There is a particular hegemonic structure in which they, with undisputed Arab trading traditions stand in dominant relation to predominantly agricultural East coast Muslim communities.

This process, a construction or sedimentation of a **symbolic history** which reveals a complex religious ordering of the links between 'race', wealth and faith, undertaken in the context of revival movements in Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities is discussed further below. Yet here we should consider the link between wealth and faith in Islamic religious ideology. This is a favourite



consideration of many of the Weber inspired studies, though discussion around these two powerfully linked ideas has often been limited to considerations of ethos, taken as a universally applicable, unexplained analytical blending of the two.<sup>39</sup> Clammer (1978) has roundly criticised any attempt to continue the assertion that Weber's project was to assert a unidirectional causal link between religious ideology on the one hand and the development of capitalism on the other. Rather it has been argued that Weber saw European capitalism as an historical category and not a universally applicable analytic construct. Weber's interest was in determining the uniqueness of European capitalism in contrast to the development or non-development of capitalism elsewhere.

Nonetheless these studies have also been more concerned with clearing up the mis-reading of Weber and asserting the possibility of indigenous Asian capitalist development, than with the discovery of internal ideologies.<sup>40</sup> This remains to be taken up. One more productive and initial step towards overcoming the positivist cast of prior analysis would be to take into account the way in which wealth and faith stand in symbolic relation in this particular Muslim community, rather than to search for the degree of correlation between the production of wealth (in contrast to its meaning) and the ideology of faith (in contrast to the domains of its practice).

To anticipate my conclusion there is, in the Sri Lankan context a definite link between the production of wealth **by a trader** and what it means to profess the faith of Islam. There are a number of levels to this conception. One of the most important is the explicit link with Arab traders and the Middle East and the arrival of Islam. Another which develops from this is the direct blood link claimed by traders who reflect in their trading traditions, their patrilineal (religious and 'racial') links with the Middle East. Another level concerns the general understanding that wealth is open to interpretation as the rewards of an active faith, in itself a further legitimating factor. Muslims in the research area state that

being a Muslim (their ethos) involves preparing for this world as if you would live forever and preparing for the afterlife as if you would die tomorrow.

---

<sup>39</sup> Johns (1975) insists on the uncertainty of what one may or can mean by "Islam".

<sup>40</sup> Mines (1972) for example.

Thus the pursuit of worldly wealth, and the ability to responsibly provide for your family and the poor are endorsed as religious modes of being. Worldly wealth may therefore be interpreted as a sign of grace. There is however a certain ambiguity in the possession of great wealth. It does not guarantee the automatic respect of the Muslim community, through an appreciation of this sign of grace. Rather it places the individual firmly in the public eye and subject to harsh critique with regard to the discharge of his 'Islamic duty' to provide for the poor in particular, and the community in general. The wealthy Muslim in my observation was extremely rigorous in his observance of this duty; a rigour which increased along with increasing wealth.<sup>41</sup> This tendency marks a further point of contrast in the ethos of Hindu and Muslim as Buss (1985) argues following Weber. It would not have occurred to a Hindu

to see in the success of his economic professional integrity the signs of his state of grace or - what is more important - to evaluate and to undertake the rational reconstitution of the world according to objective principles as a realisation of God's will (Weber, 1921:360, Buss translation).

Both Mines in Tamil Nadu and Mauroof in Sri Lanka have noted the "windfall circumstances" by which investment capital is expected to be generated. Mauroof argues that the fascination of the gem business

derives from the stories current in the country of some individual or the other striking it rich quickly because of the accidental find of a rare stone (ibid:177).

This sudden accumulation of wealth through hard work and some "unusual circumstance" is found in other businesses too (ibid, op cit). He also argues that the recent growth of "inept bureaucracies" has further increased this view.

(S)ince favours from politicians for a quota or an export licence are more fortuitous and frivolous than predictable and systematic, i.e. **seemingly magical**, the windfall pattern that suddenly makes millionaires out of peddlars seems to persist (ibid, op cit, my emphasis).

This magical quality is also open to interpretation as miraculous and the resulting wealth as a gift of God.<sup>42</sup> Wealthy gem traders in

---

<sup>41</sup> See also Mauroof (1972).

<sup>42</sup> Mauroof elsewhere (1972:69) uses the "gem trader" as one of three ideal types in the Muslim trading community. The other two are the urban entrepreneur and the village boutique keeper. The gem trader however is one whose wealth is perceived as sacred, a notion which is extended in their use of secret gestures "to sign deals and quote prices" (ibid, op cit). He argues that "the wealth that gem traders deal in comes from within the soil and is retrieved,



particular, may conceivably be regarded as truly blessed, with their wealth signing their faith.

Rodinson (1974) who takes a wider definition of capitalism than that of many other Marxists and sees it as any kind of entrepreneurial activity carried out on a systematic basis, argues "that the influence of Islam on socio-economic development is minimal" (cited Clammer, 1978:5). There is nothing inherent in the Qur'an or the Sunnath which can be interpreted as inhibiting the development of capitalism, which was as Clammer points out, not necessarily the way it was interpreted in South East Asia (ibid, op cit). Further he argues that the forms of embryonic capitalism found in the mediaeval Muslim world were of a similar type to those of Europe. Despite all subsequent differences in the socio-economic development of the two regions - Islam itself cannot be isolated as the factor for the inhibition of capitalism or modernisation (ibid, op cit). Rodinson's argument is explicitly concerned with the (economic) rationality of the belief system and he fails to embed this in the cultures of the Middle East. Weber did not write simply of the rationality of religious beliefs themselves, but about the complex levels of sociological, practical and ideological implications that those beliefs have in relation to **their attendant cultures** (ibid, op cit, my emphasis). My concern is not to argue for or against the relevance of the Islamic doctrines or local interpretations as to their effect in initiating, facilitating or retarding capitalist development. My point is that contra Rodinson (1974) the influence of Islam **in the Sri Lankan context**, although not substantially integral to the development of capitalism per se, is nonetheless employed in the

---

processed and handled in a manner that stands in stark contrast to the ways in which the ordinary peasant derives his wealth by tilling the soil" (ibid, op cit). I agree with this point entirely but would argue that there is a further symbolic significance to the gem trader which he has missed. Gem trading in Sri Lanka seems to have been traditionally a Muslim occupation (Mohan, 1987:16) although the recent government establishment of the Ceylon Gem Corporation has introduced large numbers of Sinhalese gem brokers into the business. The island's gems were one of the initial items of trade for the Arabs and I note that Adam's Peak in the Ratnapura district lies at the head of the **Manik Ganga** (Gem River) that rises here in the highlands and runs to Kataragama by the coast in the South-East. (Both are major pilgrimage sites for Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims in the island). Thus gem trading has both historical associations with Arab traders and also arguably draws some significance from the **originary** status of Adam's Peak. A further point which should be noted is that it was the gem industry that "formed the principal foundation for the emergence of the Muslim elite" (Mohan, ibid op cit).

establishment of economic and spiritual hegemony. This hegemony is based upon the Arab trader as an **ideal** type, which through a particular cultural construction of history and religion has become a figure imbued with a religious value. This value is shared throughout the community and is exploited by those who are economically dominant in extending their dominance. Local religious ideology is employed in the service of class interests. This ideological link has its historical base in the early Islamic trading communities and a general view that Muslims were traders and it received new emphasis in the late British period during the cultural revivals of the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities. In short, there is within Sri Lanka, an ideology of particularly **Arab** traders, in which **both** Arab origins and trading itself, have great, and current, significance.



**SECTION TWO :**

**RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY  
AND  
CALENDRIAL PRACTICE.**

## Chapter Four :

### Saint's Shrines: Islamic Presence - Islamic Practice

I have discussed this particular Muslim community in terms of its historical, political and socio-cultural context. I have argued that religion has been a critical element of ethnic and political identity, and further a critical element in the assertion of political power. In this section I wish to address this Muslim community in terms of its relations to the wider Islamic world, through an examination of its religious and ritual practice. While this community shares much in common with the Islamic world in broad ideological terms, its' historical particularity shapes a significant part of its' religious practice and ideological interpretation. Following Geertz (ibid) who argued strongly for the distinction observed in practices emergent from different cultural contexts, I focus here on the particularities of this Islamic community as a preliminary step in analysis. There are different "Islams" (Eickelman 1982, Geertz ibid) and anthropological comparison cannot be undertaken unproblematically. Islamic practices in distinct cultural and historical contexts, may appear similar but we must initially compare the ideologies in which such practices are embedded (Dumont 1980).

In this second section of the thesis, I explore Islamic ideology and ritual practice among Muslims in Weligama, with a view to asserting their interpretations of egalitarian religious practice. I examine Islamic ideology as it is revealed in the practices surrounding the shrines of the saints, and contrast it with differing ideologies in the South Asian region and with analyses of shrine practices in Morocco. I discuss Islamic ideology as it is revealed in the rituals associated with the mosques and examine their articulation with the domestic order. Finally I explore the ideology evident in the calendrical rituals surrounding Ramazan and the Hajj pilgrimage. This leads to a discussion of the particular relation of gender and cosmology and the meaning of the marriage ritual in this cultural context. By focussing on ritual practice I take ritual as a cultural hermeneutic and elicit the potentially wider meanings of ritual in cultural practice. By observing the operation of an egalitarian ideology employed in this particular cultural context we may begin



to understand both, what egalitarian ideology overcomes, and how this movement is achieved in ritual.

I argue that the **individual** in Islam, understood as an ideological value (Dumont:ibid) is created through the rituals of Islam itself. Calendrical Islamic rituals culminating in the Hajj pilgrimage essay an argument, which in liminal practice, strips the historically distinct, culturally embedded individual of all elements of a given social and historical identity. Taken as a ritual complex, calendrical ritual may be seen to operate against status, kinship networks, social context, history, time and finally gender, creating the **Islamic individual** and ultimately the universal Muslim collectivity that is the **ummah**. There is a logic of inclusion within Islamic ritual practice that actually recognizes vast distinction at the periphery and which legitimates all points of difference on a periphery-centre continuum. In the discussion of the calendrical ritual this point will become much clearer as we examine this logic which becomes ritually operative between Ramazan and the Hajj. The Hajj can be argued to be the ultimate point of inclusion when individuals are granted their greatest degree of substantiation and even gender differences are denied/overcome. The very practice of the Hajj pilgrimage recognizes cultural and historical distinction and reveals the means by which those distinctions are ritually negated. This is the level at which we should begin to determine what is universal in Islam - in the contents of its own arguments, essayed in ritual structure and enlivened by culturally embedded actors. The calendrical complex is the argument of the universality of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Saint's Shrines - Orthodox or Popular Islam

The material on Sri Lankan Muslim saints calls into question previous assumptions that the ideologies behind a common Muslim practice - 'saint worship', although emergent from the one Islamic ideology, are in fact identical.<sup>2</sup> Part of the problem is that Islamic ideology has

---

<sup>1</sup> The Hajj pilgrimage is the pre-eminent ritual of a universal Islam and it is surprising that so little analytic attention has been paid to it. Previous studies have tended to treat the **hajj** "as a means of confirming social status or as a religious rite de passage" (Eickelman, 1982:11), and/or "a ritual of affliction" (Roff, 1984:239-40).

<sup>2</sup> Currie (1989) points out that "scholars have tended to use the word 'saint' to translate a plurality of Arabic, Persian and Urdu terms. By rendering wali, murshid, shakyh, darvish, sufi, pir or

generally been taken for granted as a given set of practices and consequently a common set of interpretations has been assumed to lie behind them. To some extent this is true and much universal interpretation may be found. However to assume their identical meaning from the outset, denies both historical particularity and the **tension** which is the dynamic behind much current Islamic 'reform'.<sup>3</sup> This reform takes very distinct forms throughout the Islamic world, but in all cases, endeavours to overcome the perceived gaps between what are (locally) held to be the orthodox understandings behind prescribed practices, and local culturally and historically generated interpretations. The tension behind reform reflects a constant dynamic within Islam which is universally appreciated by Muslims themselves. A crucial and a fundamental step in any ethnographic analysis, must be to recognise it and explore it.<sup>4</sup>

Islam in all cultural contexts presents a set of contradictions between the ideal and the real; the ideal Islamic society of the Qur'an and the everyday cultural reality. The dichotomies routinely drawn by anthropologists in relation to particular Islamic communities; orthodox/popular, scriptural/folk, are an initial recognition of a tension internal to communities, but less often of the fact that this tension is recognised by and often of fundamental

---

marabout as 'saint' the reader is led to believe that he is dealing with a single category. This obscures the considerable diversity which underlies these terms" (ibid:1). Turner makes a similar point. "When Western anthropologists talk about Islamic saints, they use the term as a shorthand for a diversity of social roles" (Turner, 1974:61).

<sup>3</sup> Reform as I use it here, implies only a common **process**, but in no sense, a taken for granted, common structure to that process. It follows therefore that Islamisation may also only be taken to indicate **movement** towards what is locally (not universally) held to be orthodox, universal Islam. I do not deny any evidence, or increasing likelihood, that these movements may come to be similarly motivated as various Islamic states take advantage of increasing print opportunities to promote distinct ideologies of the correct 'universal' Islam. There was a Libyan funded local newspaper in the research area for instance, but this had not had any success.

<sup>4</sup> A fundamental recognition of the acceptance of debate and interpretation (although limited) within Islam may be drawn from Mecca. The four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence (**madhhab**) are incorporated symbolically and ideologically at the heart of Islam itself. Surrounding the Ka'bah, within the Holy Mosque at Mecca, are the pulpits (**minbars**) of each madhhab, where the leaders of each school may represent their ideological positions to the Muslim collectivity during the hajj.



concern, to those communities.<sup>5</sup> Eickelman states that in Morocco there is

an inherent tension between formal ideological tenets propagated and accepted by an educated, religious elite and, coexisting with them, an implicit ideology of religion as locally practiced and understood (1977:5).

The religious practices of the subordinate classes are frequently considered un-Islamic by the elite but "are taken for granted as authentic expressions" of their religious traditions by the people themselves (ibid: op cit). By formulating the dichotomy as between "orthodox" Islam on the one hand, and "popular" practice on the other, the tension inherent in Islam itself (or Islam in practice) is denied, by classifying "popular" practice as outside it. In this schema Islamisation or reform of folk practices may only be argued to be a movement **to** Islam, rather than a movement **within** it. On the whole however, the "orthodox" schema is assumed (and assumed to be universal), rather than examined, and "popular" folk practices are discounted as aberrations. It is an analytic practice, which, from the outset, rends the fabric of the cultural world, and denies the apperception of that world as a totality, by those who live it. Further, this analytical glossing denies much that is of particular interest; the particular context of **internal** Islamic debates, and the ways in which Muslims interpret and work with these tensions ideologically, in their efforts towards reform.

#### 4.2 Windows to Heaven - Understanding Shrine practice.

Saints shrines are a common phenomenon throughout the Muslim world. Equally common has been their classification by anthropologists as features of a "popular" as opposed to an "orthodox" Islam (Von Grunebaum, 1988, Spooner, 1963, Gellner, 1972, Fernea & Fernea, 1972, Eickelman, 1976, 1977, Marx, 1977, Peters, 1990, Currie, 1992, Jones, 1979, Lewis, 1980, Dwyer, 1982, Waardenburg, 1978, 1979, 1985, Goldziher, 1977 Saiyed, 1989, ).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Gellner reported a "permanent, if sometimes latent, tension and opposition between two styles of religious life" (1981:159).

<sup>6</sup> The dichotomy is here glossed as "orthodox/popular", although it has been formulated slightly differently by some scholars. Waardenburg has moved from an "official/popular" classification (1978, 1979) to that of "mystical/normative" (1985). Dwyer contrasts "mystical" and "orthodox" and Spooner (1963) distinguishes between "mosque" and "shrine" religions (characterised by ideologies of

This position appears to be derived from the greater focus given to shrine **practice** rather than to shrine **ideology**. Shrine practice or "worship" has been viewed primarily as intercessory activity in which Muslims seek boons from the entombed saint. The tomb itself, in these cases is regarded as a "source of miraculous power" (Lawrence 1984:121). This implies a tacit polytheistic influence in a religious community that purports to be entirely monotheistic. It is this contradiction which underlies the Western analytical decision to class these practices as popular, in opposition to orthodox. This is evidence of a comparative method which fails to account for cultural and historical particularity.<sup>7</sup> The shrines in the Sri Lankan context may not be regarded as simply intercessory. Neither shrine practice nor shrine ideology in Sri Lanka may be satisfactorily discussed within the "intercessory" framework, and indeed both present a thorough challenge to it. I describe the basis behind Sri Lankan shrine practice, Sri Lankan shrine myths, shrine ideology in practice and finally I compare the Sri Lankan myths to others in the region.

The locations of saint's shrines on the island mirror the distribution of the Muslim community and there are over one thousand shrines throughout the island.<sup>8</sup> In sharp contrast to the

---

equality and hierarchy). Gellner classes the dichotomy as "legalistic/mystic" (1981:115), and as "mystical" and "formal" alternatives, within the urban context, with "mystical" serving as the surrogate for "formal" Islam in the rural environs (1972:8).

<sup>7</sup> Lewis points out that "the Qur'an itself provides scriptural warrant for the existence of a host of subsidiary powers and spirits (ibid:60).

<sup>8</sup> The 1975 list of Mosques, Shrines, Places of religious Worship and Muslim Charitable Trusts gives the following numbers by District. I have included only Mosques, shrines and Takia's. A total figure of 1219.

Anuradhapura	77	Badulla	42
Batticaloa	144	Colombo	107
Galle	44	Hambantota	12
Jaffna	24	Kalutara	63
Kandy	131	Kegalle	63
Kurenagala	119	Mannar	49
Matale	34	Matara	28
Nuwara Eliya	18	Moneragala	12
Polunnaruwa	26	Puttalam	94
Ratnapura	24	Trincomalee	88
Vavuniya	15	(Borah Mosques)	5



'folk/orthodox' distinctions revealed in other ethnographies, the shrines here are almost always located adjacent to a mosque, often under the same roof, although clearly distinct in both area and character. In many cases the shrine has come first. The location of shrines as almost invariably joined to a mosque is highly significant and reflects at the ideological level, the position of the shrine in relation to the mosque. There is no greater statement of the orthodox position of shrines within Islamic practices and understandings on the island. The shrines stand at the heart of orthodox Islam on the island, and shrine practice continually engages an ideology which reasserts the position of the island as integral to an Arabic cosmology.

The shrine generally contains at least one large oblong tomb **ziyarrah**, which stands directly above the actual grave of the saint. It is a marker and not a container.<sup>9</sup> The ziyarrah is invariably painted green and covered with a number of predominantly green cloths which have been donated as gifts to the saint.<sup>10</sup> Many shrines have a separate entrance direct from the outside as well as one which leads from the interior of the mosque. This outside entrance is essential if women are to worship freely at the shrines. The women are not permitted to enter or pray within the **haram** (sacred) area of the mosque itself, and at most shrines their visits are normally subdued, and in very small numbers. There are however significant exceptions to which I will refer below.

---

*Muslim Mosques and Charitable Trusts or Wakfs (Amendment) Act No. 33 of 1982. Supplement to Pt II of Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka of September 24, 1982. Colombo, Government Publications Bureau.*

<sup>9</sup> In some shrines there are also one or two other tombs of the disciples of the saint. In these cases the other tombs are smaller and placed to one side.

<sup>10</sup> Green is understood to be the colour of death and the afterlife, a powerful symbol of death and rebirth. As I will argue below it should be understood as the colour of transcendence or "living death". At the Porwai (Poruwa) Feast in Godepitya one of the Bawas (Sufis) from the East coast stated that the bolts of green cloth which were on sale there could be made into shirts by Bawas but could only be used by other Muslims to cover tombs. The Bawas undergo an initiation rite which is essentially a burial and when they do die no further rites are required (see also McGilvray, 1974).

Initially I explore the understandings behind shrine practice through an exploration of the ideology of death as reflected in the community's burial rituals. The meaning of the shrine and the power of the entombed saint in this cultural context are located in wider Islamic understandings concerning the nature of the Muslim individual, and the individual experience of death. The fact that death is universal is significant in a religious (as well as a social) sense. The religious requirements at birth and death in local Muslim communities are both simple and widely observed. Thus the high points of embedded individual life experience - entering and leaving the cultural world are ritualized in an entirely Islamic form. These rituals provide a critical condensation of the religious arguments about what it is to be a Muslim and therefore may be seen as ontological. In this community the rituals are generally accepted to be performed entirely in accordance with "orthodox" Islamic practice, with no "cultural" component.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Burial Rituals.**

When a Muslim dies the preparation of the body and the burial of the corpse should proceed very quickly. In most cases the body is buried within eight to twelve hours, although on occasion, the burial may be delayed a little in order to await the arrival of a son or father from elsewhere in the island.<sup>12</sup> The corpse is ritually washed (**kulappaaduthal**) by a male or female member of the Ande caste and then wrapped in the burial cloth - **kafan**.<sup>13</sup> The ritual washing of the

---

<sup>11</sup> See Bowen (1984) for a contrasting argument concerning death rituals among the Gayo.

<sup>12</sup> A high percentage of the younger Muslim men work elsewhere in the island and a significant number of the adult men. Bus travel is constant, as is the bus service.

<sup>13</sup> The **kulippaaddupavar** (corpse washers) in the research area are these days all members of the **ande** caste. Formerly this task was the province of the Osta (barber caste), but they have given it up because they say, "the financial rewards are insufficient". Generally the washers work in male or female pairs, and the complete washing takes two hours. They are called by the household as soon as someone has died, and they wash the body immediately. The burial cloths and all the towels for drying the body are provided by the funeral household. The body is washed successively with soap, water, sea-water and rose-water. After this, the complete ablutions required to ensure bodily purity for prayer, are performed with pure well-water. The body is then wrapped in seven cloths; three **saddai**, one **thoppi**, one **muhamoodi**, one **pavadai**, and the **kafan**. If the deceased is a woman a further seven cloths are used to cover the vulva. The payment for this duty ranges from fifty to one hundred Rupees and payment is



corpse is a highly elaborated form of the purificatory ablutions performed by Muslims before prayer. The body of the deceased is therefore, moved into a state of ritual purity and this pure state is maintained by the sealing of the orifices and the wrapping of the body in the other cloths, before it is sealed in the **kafan**. After the family gather in the house and say prayers on behalf of the deceased, the shrouded body is placed in the **sunduq**<sup>14</sup> which has been brought from the local mosque. News of the death travels quickly and the local men gather at the house in order to escort the body to the mosque for final prayers. This crowd is not restricted to the kin group of the deceased, or merely reflective of their wider social network. Rather it engages all the local men who are able to participate. Escorting a Muslim corpse to the mosque, and praying for the salvation of a soul, are responsibilities of the entire male Muslim community and not at all dependent on personal relation. This procession should proceed quickly, and any Muslims who see a burial procession, should join it. The practice is **sunnah** (recommended). Women are excluded from all the public burial rites and remain at home.<sup>15</sup> The sunduq is placed in the mosque for communal prayers, but

---

made on the day of the feast following the funeral, when prayers are offered on behalf of the deceased. Sometimes the washers are given gifts of cloth and if the deceased was from their own village Maduragoda, then food from the funeral feast house will be sent to them also.

The male **kulippaaddupuvar** also dig all the graves and supply the planks of wood which are used to cover the top of the body to protect it from the earth. One informant from this group stated that previously all graves were uniformly dug to a depth of five feet, but after a woman's body once "rose from the grave", the Moulavis advised that women should, from then on, be buried at a depth of six feet. This is in accordance with a general cultural view among Sinhalese Buddhists and local Muslims, that women are more prone to cosmological dangers. The graves for babies are dug in the normal manner and then a small hole is hollowed out on one side at the bottom of the grave and the baby is secreted there. Some Muslims believe that the Sinhalese will steal the babies skulls for use in exorcism rituals (see Kapferer 1983).

<sup>14</sup> This is a silver coloured coffin-like container on long poles, that is carried on the shoulders of men.

<sup>15</sup> The exclusion of women at this point stresses the fact that this is a male, communal religious activity and is not simply an effect of the purdah requirements. Undoubtedly however it also serves to emphasize the exclusion of women on the grounds of their cosmological weakness. In one household, when a Muslim had died in the house next door, the women and children of a large extended household moved their sleeping quarters to the front of their

the body is removed before being interred in the burial ground next to the mosque.<sup>16</sup> The body is buried in the kafan alone, placed on its right side facing Mecca, with the kafan pulled back to uncover the face slightly, to allow the cheek to be in direct contact with the earth.

Once the body is interred it is understood that an angel immediately comes to question the individual about their life on earth and whether or not their actions were exemplary.<sup>17</sup> The soul itself must remain in the grave until the final Day of Judgement, when eternal rewards or punishments are determined. However if an individual has led a perfect life, filled with prayer and good deeds, then the angel provides a "window to Heaven", in order that they may see, though not yet participate in its glories. This belief in a state of consciousness after death does not imply however, any continuing relationship between the soul of the deceased and those remaining in the phenomenal world. Death has a finality about it more marked among these Muslims than many other cultures. Long periods of grief are not recommended even for the closest relatives. Death is not considered a matter for continued grief, rather people are exhorted to direct their attention towards prayers on behalf of the soul. This communal acceptance of an individual's demise as complete "social death" is reflected in the structure of the burial itself. The body is intended to decompose very quickly, unimpeded by a coffin, and the graves themselves are designed to disappear within a relatively short period of time, leaving no mark upon the earth at all. The grave is marked with two simply carved, wooden boards (*mizan*), placed at the head and foot of the grave. The boards are painted with prayers and have no personal names on them. The *mizan* are symbolic of the scales of

---

sister's adjacent house, to avoid any possibility of contact with *shaitans* (devils or spirits) attracted by their neighbour's death.

<sup>16</sup> This is the only occasion on which the body of a woman will enter the *haram* of the mosque. This state of ritual purity in which all her orifices are sealed, permits no further breaking of boundaries to disrupt the pure state. Also at this point there can be no possible sexual attraction engendered between this female and those unrelated males at prayer, the reason behind the ruling that men and women should never pray together.

<sup>17</sup> Gaborieau notes that among Muslims in Nepal and North India "as soon as the grave is filled up, all the men go back forty paces and recite another prayer, for they believe that, at that precise moment, the two angels Munkar and Nakir come to punish the deceased in the tomb" (1984:246).



justice, and the deceased lies between them, facing an individual judgement, prior to Judgement Day. In the context of the grave the mizan symbolically represent the state and fate of the Muslim individual.<sup>18</sup>

The burial practices taken as a whole, clearly demonstrate that death should be a **complete** social death, to the point that even the grave itself is designed to disappear. Further, burial is a process which should proceed with speed, without excessive expressions of grief, and ultimately should be regarded as a birth, into the afterlife.<sup>19</sup> One should be completely dead to this world, and not the centre of any cult of remembrance or of personal aggrandizement. Following this logic it could appear that the grand shrines of saints stand in marked contradiction but in the terms of the ideology outlined above concerning "windows to heaven", the tomb should rather be seen as marking a **sacred space** and not a personal prestige.<sup>20</sup>

The tomb of any acknowledged saint, is most definitely understood to have this corridor of access, to mark a space where the veil between Heaven and Earth has been withdrawn, and is therefore in a very real

---

<sup>18</sup> The mizan (lit. "the balance scale") are "the Koran's symbol of harmony in creation and of cosmic equilibrium, and also of eschatological justice and retribution for deeds in this life" (Glassé, 1989:271).

<sup>19</sup> The feasts and celebrations held for the saints on an annual basis, throughout the Islamic world, the "death anniversary celebrations" (Lawrence *ibid*, *op cit*), or "**Urs**" (Tirmizi, 1992:59), arguably celebrate these "deaths" as points of transcendence. I suggest that death is in fact more significant generally for Muslims, a point which is consistent with an orientation towards an everlasting life. Within the research community actual birthdays are of little significance and are not ritualized or celebrated in any form, even for children. However, remembering the dead on an annual basis (not only saints but also kindred) is relatively common.

<sup>20</sup> There are Muslims who mark the graves of their loved ones, with far more permanent memorials than the wooden mizan referred to above. (In the research area these amounted to around 3%.) These graves were in most cases, those of the wealthier members of the community, who had during their lifetimes, patronised the mosques and provided well for the community. Thus in most peoples eyes they had attained a certain religious prestige. These tombs could in future become the sites for new miracles and thus potential shrines. In a truly egalitarian ideology - all may become saints. In Morocco informants reported that "it takes more than the construction of a shrine to make a marabout, but all shrines are regarded nonetheless as those of marabouts" (Eickelman 1976:103).

and immediate sense, a **sacred space**. Thus the rationale behind attendance at a shrine is generated from an understanding of **what a shrine is**, rather than simply what or who, the saint is. The shrines are pre-eminently spaces, rather than people. Shrines sacrifice spaces and make them closer to Heaven. It is within the context of this ideology, that shrine practice and "shrine worship" should be interpreted. It is clear that the idea of intercession is not entirely applicable here.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.3 The Problem of "Intercession"

Much of the discussion surrounding the practice of shrine visits implies a contradiction. The apparent worship of a saint in order to seek supernatural assistance leaves analysts uneasy in a religion which claims only one God. The idea of intercession, left unexamined, implies a tendency towards polytheism, a quasi-deification of the saint in which he comes to stand between the worlds of man and God. Crapanzano (1973:170) notes that the pilgrim in Morocco goes to the shrine of the saint in order to ask the saint to intercede with God for him, to help him to obtain something. Eickelman (1977) also lays stress on the intermediary argument but relates this to a "patron-client" understanding, generated out of the Moroccan social order and applied in the religious sphere. He argues that

the strength of maraboutism (saint worship) rests on the implicit assumption that relations between men and God work just like all other social ties (ibid:7).

As one of his informants related

God, like a minister or the King, is too powerful to be approached directly, so the client works through a marabout who is "close" both to him and to God (loc cit).

To apply these arguments on the intercessionary character of the purpose of visits to a shrine to the Sri Lankan practices would, reduce our understanding of the phenomenon to a purely functionalist one. It would deny the complexity of understanding that structures

---

<sup>21</sup> There are of course, many Sri Lankan Muslims who go to a shrine to ask for help **from** the saint. This understanding of the practice is disparaged by others on the same grounds as those applied by Western analysts, that of "tacit polytheism", and a failure to realise that Allah alone, is the source of all things. The ideology that I have outlined above however, is prevalent, and ultimately closer to a cultural exposition of the Islamic ideology of shrines in this context. It is also I suggest, a likely unexplored possibility of other Islamic ideologies on the issue.



Sri Lankan Muslim thought and action. In this cultural context the practice of worship at the shrine of a saint is not "intercessionary" in our taken-for-granted sense. The significance of the shrine practice is primarily in its ideas of space and a cosmology which outlines a "sacred geography". When we reveal the logic behind their practice, we find that saint "worship" presents no contradiction to the idea of a single God. It is true that the saint does embody divine power as a result of his exemplary life but he himself is not regarded as an intercessionary figure in the sense that we take for granted. The logic illustrates clearly that the 'intercession' has a particular character. The saint as a result of his exemplary life has attained a consciousness after death with a clear view of heaven. He is incapable of **action** in the sense of granting boons, in fact it would appear that he has no consciousness of life on earth at all - that he is oriented only towards heaven. However he is intercessionary in the sense that his **sentient** soul remains entombed as permanent "witness to heaven" and provides for those who visit a means of greater access to God.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of intercession which I have outlined as the logic behind the Sri Lankan practices is quite possibly an unexplored element in the Moroccan practices also. Certainly both Eickelman (1977:6 & 255) and Crapanzano (ibid:174) present evidence that the saints are regarded as still alive within their tombs.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.4 The Myths of the Saints.

The myths of saints in Sri Lanka fall into two distinct categories. The first set of myths tell the stories of dead saints who travelled

---

<sup>22</sup> Troll points out that dargah literally means - **place of access**, shrine (ibid,1992:xi, my emphasis). The question of access in the sense that I have outlined above however is overlooked throughout the entire text.

<sup>23</sup> Gellner also refers to "living saints" in the Maghreb (1981:40) and Gladney mentions them among the Hui in China (1987:515). Gaborieau (1984:250) reports that the founder of a purely Indian Sufi order (Madarai), Shah Badi 'al-Din Madar, is reputed to be still living in his grave. He argues that this belief indicates a Hindu parallel; the renouncer, **sanyasi** when he is buried is not considered dead but as plunged into a state of deep meditative **samadhi**. He is perhaps correct, though he overlooks the Islamic ideology cited above. I find more immediately obvious links between the Hindu ideology of renouncers and the ideology of the Sri Lankan Bawas, whose ritual practices in effect, render them dead before burial (McGilvray:ibid).

miraculously, in stone boxes on the seas, and were washed up on the shores of the island. The second set relate tales of Middle Eastern Muslims who had come to the island on pilgrimage to Adam's Peak and had died while meditating in the jungle. The location and existence of these saints, in unmarked graves, has been revealed by local miracles. Together both sets of myths account for almost all of the coastal and interior shrines on the island.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Stone boxes.**

The vast majority of these shrines are located in the South-west coastal area, and are to be found at Alutgama, Beruwala, Gintota, Galle Fort, Kaparatota (Weligama), Dondra, Matara, Miella, Kirinde and Trincomalee.<sup>25</sup> I recount here, a myth taken from the Kaparatota mosque in Weligama. This mosque stands on a small headland at the Western end of the Bay, which provides the only safe deep-water anchorage for the larger boats of the Sinhalese fishing fleet. The out-rigger canoes of the other fishermen are merely pulled to safety all along the beach. There are no longer any Muslims with boats in this area, and no history of Muslim settlement in the area immediately around the mosque.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> There are certainly others but as far as I am aware they are currently relatively few in number and I would assume those of originally foreign and religious men. This is the case with one of the research area tombs where the Indian founder (son of an Iraqi father) of one of the religious colleges is buried.

<sup>25</sup> This list corresponds exactly to the list of sites commonly given as the original sites of Arab settlement in the island. They are all coastal centres with a definite trading past. The location of the shrines therefore acts to reinforce the early orthodox nature of these centres. There is also however a similar myth in the central highlands near Kandy, where the saint arrived in a stone box travelling miraculously in the river (Jones p.c.).

<sup>26</sup> The inhabitants of the nearby Sinhalese fishing village regularly drop a small coin in the till as they pass the mosque. This gift to the saint is in order to secure the safe return of their men. The men themselves if they encounter any danger at sea, simply think of the name of the saint, and after their safe return, place a coin in the till. Fishing is a night-time activity and for the Sinhalese, the night is a time of the demonic. The Sinhalese do regularly approach different gods for assistance and perhaps in this instance, to pray to one who has mastered the sea is efficacious. Whatever the particular logic it is clear that this shrine and the saint protect both the ships at anchor, and the men at sea.



It is believed that when this saint arrived at Kaparatota, another four floating tombs were also on the sea. This particular group of five, was followed by a later group of seven.

Over 300 years ago, somewhere around 1645, a stone box was seen floating on the sea near Weligama. The Sinhalese fisherfolk who were living in the area thought it must be the debris from a ship wrecked at sea. They rushed into the sea towards the box, but the box moved further out into deeper water and they could not reach it. The following day they agreed to try and surround the box on all sides in order to bring it to shore but the box again slipped out of reach. Some Muslims from the nearby town had heard about the box by now, and went to the beach to see what this wonder was all about. To the astonishment of everybody present, the box came to the shore and the Muslims opened it to see what it was.

Inside they found a corpse fully wrapped in the Islamic *kafan* (burial cloth). With the corpse there was a *talappa* (turban), with the name Sheikh Inayathulla Vali Ullah,<sup>27</sup> a pair of sandals, a walking stick, a lamp and *miswak* (a small tooth brush made from a frayed wooden twig). The Muslims carried the box from the beach up to higher ground and put it down. When they attempted to pick it up again, they found to their astonishment that they could not lift it. They were forced to leave it there and they went back to their homes. They discussed the matter with other Muslims, and all agreed that the body should be brought to the Muslim area (Galbokka/New Street) and buried. During their sleep, they all dreamt that the saint was speaking to them, and making it known that he wished to be buried on exactly the spot where the stone box now remained.

The land near the beach where the box stood, belonged to a Sinhalese man, and the Muslims approached him in the morning to tell him all that had happened and also that they wanted some land from him. He refused their request and demanded that they remove the box immediately. The Muslims then returned to the land and tried innumerable ways to move the box but found that they still could not lift it. As evening fell they returned to the Sinhalese landowner and told him they had not yet been able to shift the box, but that they would return in the morning with more men.

That night Sheikh Inayathulla came to the Sinhalese landowner as he slept and beat him with a cane, leaving marks all over his body. The landowner could not bear the pain and came running in the dead of night, to the home of a Moulavi, and told him what had happened and showed him the marks. He said he had no further objection to the corpse being buried on his

---

<sup>27</sup> Valli Ullah here reportedly means "friend of Allah". This is more often rendered Awliya, the term used to refer to all the saints. The Arabic word for saint is *wali* (pl *awliya*) literally "friend" or "patron" (Geijbels, 1978:176).

land, and he donated two acres and some money towards the building of a small mosque.<sup>28</sup>

Sheikh Inayathulla is believed to have lived in Iraq, where he was a **faqir** (holy man) who had spent his life preaching. His two disciples had buried him in the stone box according to his wishes, and cast him into the sea. They then left Iraq and travelled the world in search of him. They finally found him in Kaparatota where they became caretakers of the shrine until their deaths. Their tombs are also in the shrine, on either side of Inayathullah's. The saint's miswak, was planted in the ground and has grown into a huge tree which stands beside the shrine.<sup>29</sup> During the annual mosque feast flags are hoisted on a rope which stretches between the tree and the mosque thus linking the two in this ritual celebration.<sup>30</sup> The tree itself has curative properties, and its roots, leaves, bark, flowers and unripe fruit were formerly used to cure a wide variety of illnesses from asthma to wounds and burns.<sup>31</sup> During the 1915 ethnic riots between the Muslims and the Sinhalese this mosque was destroyed. A Sinhalese man however, who attempted to destroy the saint's tomb "fell a victim to his own axe" and died instantly. Someone else tried to chop down the tree and "it oozed blood" where it was cut. Ultimately neither tree nor tomb was destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> This version was given to me by the Imam of the Mosque.

<sup>29</sup> Similar circumstances have been observed in Pakistan. Solitary trees standing near shrines there are often regarded as sacred and it is sometimes alleged that after a saint's death his disciples "planted his staff into the ground and it became a tree" (Geijbels, *ibid*:178).

<sup>30</sup> There are only two mosque feasts in this area at which flags are raised and some local informants argue that this practice has more to do with Hinduism than Islam. The flags themselves (pennants really) are invariably green and white (considered Islamic colours). The use of flags at shrines has been reported in Tamil Nadu by Mines (1972:41), in Pakistan by Geijbels (*ibid*:178), in Kashmir by Khan (1992:173), in Kerala by Dale & Menon (*ibid*:534) and in Rajasthan by Moini (1992:70). At the Sea-shore Mosque in Kalmunai (Eastern Province) a particular flag known as **pooran kudi** - centipede flag, is raised at the mosque feast.

<sup>31</sup> The medicinal cures from the tree have faded in importance in recent times, but their existence is widely known.

<sup>32</sup> The tomb that was in the shrine at the Station Road mosque was destroyed in these riots. The Koledande mosque was also destroyed, with the use of dynamite, but the nearby Kapuwatta mosque was untouched, owing to the close relations between this village and a local Sinhalese **vithane** - headman.



There are a number of levels of meaning in the interpretation of this myth. The first condenses around the miraculous journey of the dead saint to the shores of Ceylon. When entombed on the island, his tomb marks a sacred space. A second level of interpretation is the clear metaphoric reference, to the arrival of Islam itself on the island, brought by Arab traders sailing from the Middle East and settling in various coastal ports. This metaphor stresses the fundamentally pure nature of the Islam on the island and further the greater orthodoxy of the earliest sites of settlement. The myth also contains a clear ideological statement concerning the supremacy of the saint and his determination to be entombed on the headland. The 'struggles' with a Sinhalese landlord are also a very common feature of the saints' myths and refer to the situation of the first Muslims who were always in the position of having to acquire land.<sup>33</sup> This they invariably did through the marriages they contracted with indigenous women.<sup>34</sup> The Kaparatota shrine attracts family groups who often come on a pilgrimage for the day and recite *Ya Sin Sura*,<sup>35</sup> combining a picnic and beach visit with their pilgrimage purpose. When groups come from Galle, Matara or Balapitiya they will often remain in the shrine and mosque all night, returning home in the early morning.

#### **Miraculous revelations.**

The second type of shrine are those of saints who initially reveal their presence through a miracle which occurs on the spot where they are buried. These myths also have a set of common features and outline a particular logic. These saints were men who came on

---

<sup>33</sup> The saint in the Kahatapitiya shrine at Gampola, Bhawa Kauf, was one of five saints who came from Mecca in the seventeenth century and were granted lands by the Sinhalese King. Saint Sheikh Shahul Hamid Nagore Meeran Sahib was granted land by the Rajah of Tanjore in India after he cured him (Thawfeeq, *ibid*:115-121). In these cases both saints demonstrated the superior power of their faith.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this is the cultural significance which leads people to this particular mosque when their problem is that of finding a husband for their daughter. When a marriage takes place in these circumstances it is common for the young couple to return together to the shrine, bringing a gift with them. Marrying daughters is always a difficult business for poorer Muslim families because of the 'dowry problem'.

<sup>35</sup> *Ya Sin Sura* has a special significance for Muslims in this area see Chapter Seven.

pilgrimage to Adam's Peak and later died while meditating in the jungle. These shrines are some distance from the coast and spread throughout the interior of the island. The example here is taken from the Dewatagaha Mosque in Colombo. This is the most important Muslim shrine in Colombo and is widely patronised by members of all faiths and from all social groups. The myth elaborates both the original miracle which led to the discovery of the saint, and his later identification by another foreign Muslim. Finally it outlines the establishment of a feast in his name, to celebrate his 'birthday'. As with the shrines above, the sacred space, once discovered, is immediately cloaked in the surrounds of a new public mosque, thus rendering it the potential heart of a new Muslim community. While the stone box myths stress the establishment of an **Islamic presence** on the island, these myths are distinct in that they stress the establishment of **Islamic practice**.

Each miraculous revelation myth may be taken as an ideological statement which outlines both the movement of a pure and originary Islam from the Islamic heartlands to the island of Sri Lanka, and the establishment of its correct practices here, in a non-Islamic context. In short it is an ideology of the arrival of Islam and Islamic practice.

In 1820 a Sinhalese woman who was an oilmonger and the sole wage-earner in her family, was going on her daily rounds travelling from Bambalapitiya through the cinnamon jungle to Maradana. In the jungle she tripped over the root of a **cadju** (cashew) tree and fell, smashing her clay pot to pieces. She cried out bitterly because her family would have no food that day as her only source of income had been destroyed. She wept until she fell asleep exhausted. She awoke to hear a voice telling her not to despair, that everything would be alright soon. When she looked up and found no one in sight she broke into desperate tears again.

Again she heard the voice, and suddenly she saw "an old man in green garb (whose) holy mien was an inspiring sight": He told her that she had nothing to fear, and that he would give her oil, if only she would fetch him a pot. The woman ran to the house of a Muslim, Mamina Lebbe, in Maradana. He was one of her regular customers and she asked his mother to give her a new pot. When she returned to the jungle she found the old man reclining against a Dawata tree. He told her to place the pot on the ground where the other one had broken. Then he pressed his foot on the ground and the oil bubbled up from beneath. The woman was able to scoop up the oil with leaves and refill her pot. The old man asked her to tell her Muslim customers of the events, and the spot where he had appeared. She thanked him and invoked his blessings.

The woman told the Muslims of this miracle and a party of them went to find the evidence in the jungle; the oil, the broken



pot, the cadju tree and the Dawata tree. The party then recited Ya Sin and the Fathiha (the primary article of Islamic faith) and prayed "Oh Valiyullah", Praise be to Allah for having given us the opportunity to bear witness to your miracle". They prayed that Allah would reveal to them the identity of the unknown saint. The Muslims appointed Mamina Lebbe as their leader and the trustee of the shrine.

In 1847 a saint (divine) came to Ceylon from the Mahgreb and took up residence at the Maradana Mosque. When he was informed of the miracle he went to the shrine with a number of other Muslims and they recited prayers together. The divine shrouded himself with his robe and knelt upon the ground seeking communion with the buried saint. When he emerged from his robe it appeared as though his face was ablaze with a divine light. He said that the grave was that of a "most venerable saint (by the name of) Seyed Usman Siddiq Ibn Abdurahaman, from Arafat in Arabia, one who came to this island on a pilgrimage to Adam's Peak and after living in the vicinity for some time, died here". The divine having announced the name of the saint declared that henceforth each year there would be a ten day **nowlood** recital and distribution of **ghee rice** as **niyaath** to the people. He gave a sovereign to Mamina Lebbe to prepare ghee rice immediately and then he took a bamboo pole, and tearing off a piece of his white turban to make a flag, planted this flagpole in the ground at the head of the grave.<sup>36</sup>

The practice at the shrine reflects the details of the original myth. An enormous oil lamp stands just outside the shrine, and is kept burning continually, with gifts of oil. Women passing often stop to offer a prayer here and many of them dip a finger in the oil to anoint the forehead or tongue of an accompanying child. This practice is peculiar to this shrine.<sup>37</sup> Above the ziyarram there hangs another large glass oil lamp, and the ziyarram itself is piled high with gifts of cloth. The men either pray inside the shrine or in its doorway and very small boys are often seen circumambulating the ziyarram with their fathers. In these cases the safe conception and delivery of the child is being acknowledged, a common practice among the Muslims. Adjacent to the shrine is a room reserved for women, which is divided from the shrine by an iron grille. Women often tie a small votive piece of cloth with a coin in it to the grille and

---

<sup>36</sup> This version of the myth is adapted from Thawfeeq (ibid:109-111).

<sup>37</sup> I am referring here, to the shrines that I saw on the South-west coast where the large brass open oil lamps were rare. It could be a more common practice elsewhere. I observed a woman performing a similar action at the shrine of the Sea-shore mosque in Kalmunai on the East Coast. Perhaps this is a borrowed Hindu custom. "Traditional Hindus generally consider the oil used in cleaning idols in temples to have special curative properties" (Dale & Menon, ibid:531 ff19).



others bring garlands of white flowers to hang there.<sup>38</sup> Other women as they leave, may take a few of these flowers back to their homes. Gifts of food and milk are also common at this shrine, and on Thursday evenings before **Jumma** (Friday) crowds of beggars gather at the gates to receive **zakat** (alms) and gifts of food.

The saint of the myth had come to the island on **pilgrimage** and died "living in the vicinity" (ibid: op cit). Not explicitly stated here, but nonetheless common in myths of this type, is the belief that the saint died while meditating in the jungle.<sup>39</sup> The idea of meditating in the jungle is common in Hindu and Buddhist thought, and often engages ideas of states beyond pain and of supernatural endurance. In many respects the Muslim saint or Sufi shares the fate of the Hindu "renouncer", isolated from society and engaged in full-time religious reflection. The Bawas are the only contemporary group of full-time religious mendicants amongst the Muslims and many of them may be seen wearing green cloaks and turbans to represent their status as 'living dead'. Despite this however, most of them live with their families, on the East coast.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> This shrine is patronised by people of all faiths and the offering of garlands is likely a Hindu gift. Buddhists often take flowers to their own temples, but Muslims do not. A Sinhalese woman at the shrine (a servant in a prominent Colombo politician's family) was wearing a white sari. She wore it in the manner of a Muslim woman, with the end pulled up to cover her head, in deference to the fact that it was a Muslim shrine. She wore white however, because to Buddhists that symbolizes purity and auspiciousness, and is therefore the colour most often worn to temples, particularly on Poya (Full Moon) Days. Muslim women almost never wear white saris, apart from the occasional wedding, and very often the bride wears a Western style wedding dress on that occasion, even amongst the working classes.

<sup>39</sup> Thawfeeq (ibid) provides several examples of this.

<sup>40</sup> The Hindu renouncer according to Dumont (ibid) **achieves individuality** by standing outside the social order. The Muslim saint therefore may not be reduced to the renouncer of Hindu ideology. There are a small group of Bawas who live the year round in caves, at a shrine known as Dafter Jailani (near Adam's Peak). The Jailani myth has an explicit association with the Bawas, featuring a man in a green turban who appeared to a little boy who fell into one of its many caves. The Bawas who reside at Jailani are reported to wear little or no clothing and in this respect may appear similar to Hindu holy men. Jailani has a special significance for Muslims because it is believed that a tunnel leads from here directly to Mecca. It is the site of a month long mowlood recital attended by many Muslims and in particular by the East coast Bawas, who include this as part of their annual cycle of feasts. Unlike other Muslims, many of the Bawas travel from feast to feast performing the Rifai rathib (a recital



The myths of the saints shrines have an ontological significance beyond their narrative detail. They describe "the fundamental principles of a being in the world and the orientation of such a being towards the horizons of its experience" (Kapferer, 1988:79). They support the ideology of Islam within the island and they also share part of the logic of a wider Islam. One point which looms largely significant in both types of myths, is also a fundamentally determining factor in the lives of the Muslims themselves. That is that Islam is foreign to the island and that they remain a minority Islamic community far from the origins of Islam in the Middle East. The two types of myths together elaborate the ontological horizon of this peripheral Muslim community. The stone box myths have a further and deeper significance when we place them in the context of Adam's Peak, revered by Muslims as the point of origin of man on earth. It was here where Adam first set foot on earth outside of Paradise.<sup>41</sup> The saints in their miraculous return to the island, are signing their closeness to the point of origin of man on earth, travelling through the waters of rebirth in their transcendent state. They further sacrifice the primordial point of man on earth, by their entombed presence on the island. The other type of myth, the miraculous revelation, signs the arrival of orthodox Islamic practice on the island. In this case it is the discovery of the burial places of saints who died during the performance of their religious practices, pilgrimage and meditation.

In much of the discussion of Muslim saints it is the practices which have generally been favoured as of analytic significance over the mythic contexts in which they are couched. Coupled with this, apart from the pervasive, folk variety/textual orthodoxy <sup>not enough</sup> comparative <sup>ethnographic</sup> work has been done. Geertz (ibid) is the notable exception. The particular historical and cultural contexts of Islam in Sri Lanka are vital in understanding its ideological form. In order to uncover the full significance of saint worship it is essential to examine not only the meaning of the shrines of the

---

accompanied with ecstatic practices of self-mutilation). Their month long presence at Jailani follows a month in attendance at the Porwai shrine at Godepitiya, near Akuressa. This latter feast is an important one in the research area and attended by many women in order to secure the conception and safe delivery of children.

<sup>41</sup> According to many informants, Eve came down somewhere in the Lebanon.

saints but the logic which governs the practice of saint worship also. When compared with similar practices elsewhere the distinctions revealed indicate more than simply the relocation of Islam in a different cultural environment. Rather they point to an underlying ideology in Islam which is concerned with ideas of **space** and a **sacred geography**.<sup>42</sup> The Sri Lankan distinctions should not be reduced to simply a cultural or historical variation of an Islam which is assumed to be universal. Rather the ideology underlying these practices should be closely examined in order to see if it reveals aspects of an Islam which is **universal**.

#### 4.5 Shrine Practice among Sri Lankan Muslims.

Despite the fact that the majority of mosques have shrines attached many of them are not the centre of any particular cult of worship and for the most part are not widely revered at all. By contrast there are some shrines which have an enormous following and a big reputation for curing particular ailments and these shrines are the subject of family pilgrimages at certain times of the year. Generally these occur at the time of the annual mowlood recital and feast which is held to celebrate the life and commemorate the death of the saint. Some of these shrines have a particular association with the problems of fertility and safe delivery of children and others with the problems of finding a suitable husband for a daughter of marriageable age.<sup>43</sup> All of them are patronised for minor ailments, major illnesses, success in exams, the successful outcome of litigation, finding employment locally or abroad, success in business dealings and the safe return of loved ones from the Middle East or other hazardous journeys. In these latter cases the choice of shrine reflects either the particular desires and beliefs of the family involved or the location of the shrine in their vicinity.

---

<sup>42</sup> There is a universal concern with geography in the Islamic world which is patently manifest in the orientation of all Muslims towards Mecca when they pray. Local informants report that the Ka'bah in Mecca stands beneath a replica in Heaven which is continually circumambulated by angels.

<sup>43</sup> Locally this would require a visit to the Porwai mosque shrine near Akuressa in the first case and the shrine at Kaparatota in the latter. This 'specialization' has been noted by Gaborieau in Nepal (1983, cited Saiyed, ibid:244).



When an individual has a problem that they wish to solve they will often make a vow (**niyaath**) to a saint to take a particular gift to the shrine when the problem is resolved. This conditional vow which is simply a personal promise made in the home is the usual background to a shrine visit.<sup>44</sup> Some people will go to the shrine in the first instance to make their request but this is by no means essential. For instance if a woman wakes up to find that her baby is ill she may at that moment vow to take a cup of milk or some sweets to the mosque when the child recovers. A vow may be made for any problem that an individual has and the vow itself may take a number of forms. Generally it is some small money gift to the shrine or alternatively some money, food or service provided at the next annual feast held in honour of the saint. The gifts may be oil for the lamps, milk, incense, small strips of cloth or large pieces to serve as coverings for the tomb itself and these are accompanied with a small gift of money, often a single coin, and always prayers. Those gifts which may be provided for the feast will range from a bag of rice or a bull from wealthy members of the community to small quantities of rice or coconuts from other members of the community. On occasion some will gift their labour thus women may vow to spend a certain amount of time peeling and preparing vegetables or scraping coconuts and squeezing the milk required for the feast curries. In general men do not dedicate their labour in this way.

The practices briefly outlined above are similar to those described by Crapanzano (1973) and Eickelman (1977) at saint's shrines in Morocco. The problems which individuals have to face and for which they patronize the shrines are those generated by the human condition everywhere; illness, fertility, and material well-being. As in Morocco the Sri Lankan tombs are credited with different reputations with regard to their efficacy. Thus one saint may be known as good for arthritis and rheumatism, another for fevers and a further one for problems with fertility. There is an implicit local hierarchy with respect to their efficacy and importance (Crapanzano, *ibid*:170). However a comparison between the practices at shrines in Morocco and Sri Lanka is problematic. Although within Sri Lanka there is a common logic which governs shrine practice there are

---

<sup>44</sup> In these cases the individual **directs** their prayer/vow to the shrine. Nanda and Talib writing of dargahs in Uttar Pradesh observe these 'spiritual invocations' also, but insist that Muslims are invoking the saint independent of the dargah - based on a **pir-murid** (saint-disciple) relationship (*ibid*, 1992:126).

quite different types of shrines and this may also be the case in Morocco. The most important shrines in Sri Lanka, those which attract huge crowds, including many women and often family groups are those which stand towards the interior of the island and are not limited to an association which is bounded by a village (Jailani, Kataragama, Porwai/Poruwa and Gampola). By contrast the mosque and shrine at Alutgama, in the centre of the South Western coast, and one of the first sites of Arab settlement presents itself as a bastion of orthodoxy and doesn't permit women to attend its feast, one of the most important in the calendar. This is in line with the general scheme of ideas which relates men more strongly to *din* - religion and women more strongly with *valakkam* - custom. When these opposing sets are placed in the context of the history of Islam on the island the fact that the coast bore all the earliest sites of settlement renders those shrines more orthodox than those of the interior. Current feast practices reinforce this logic.

Apart from the two types of shrines in Sri Lanka there do appear to be some other significant differences in the shrine practices and understandings in the two countries. In the Moroccan studies the stress on the pilgrimage aspect of the visit is somewhat stronger and two visits are required. On the first the pilgrim makes known their problem to the saint and promises to come again bringing a particular sacrificial gift when the problem is solved. A small strip of cloth is tied either at the grotto itself or to the branches of a tree in one of the urban lodges (*ibid*:177). In Sri Lanka the initial vow is made in the home, or wherever the individual happens to be. There are occasions when individuals may make a pilgrimage to make a vow known followed by a second visit upon resolution. This is by no means the norm however and is more commonly associated with some shrines rather than others. In fact some shrines are the particular focus of annual feasts on a very large scale attracting people from near and far and in these cases families may make pilgrimages only once a year though they may make vows to the saint throughout. The Porwai shrine to a Muslim saint in Godepitiya, the Jailani shrine and the shrines at Kataragama (a site which is shared by all faiths) all fall into this category. The shrine at the Dewatagaha Mosque in Colombo on the other hand, is attended by huge crowds every night and the practice here is for individuals to visit on a regular basis for a promised period of time. Thus they may come weekly for two months or monthly for three months etc. The practice of the vow itself has a different structure also. In Morocco the vow



is composed of two parts, there is both **ar** - vow and **debiha** - fulfillment of vow (ibid:178). In Sri Lanka by contrast the vow itself, the gift promised and the food distributed at a feast are all condensed in the term **niyaath**. Once the request has been granted the Muslim is duty bound to fulfill their vow. Another difference in the practice is in the gifting of sacrificial animals to the shrines. The only occasion on which Muslims would gift a sacrificial animal would be on the occasion of the annual feast at a particular mosque. In those cases the sacrificial animal could be a goat but in most cases would be a bull and therefore would be limited to the wealthier members of the community. At all other times some other gift would be offered. All animals that are eaten are of course sacrificed and it is not unheard of for a family to sacrifice a bull at home for the sake of their household's health and welfare<sup>45</sup>. I suggest that part of the Moroccan preference for offering sacrificial fowls to the shrines is that some of their shrines are to demonesses such as Aisha Qandisha who require blood sacrifice before they grant their boon. It does give weight to the argument that in these cultural contexts saints intercede for individuals but in the Sri Lankan context it would conflict with the logic that all life from sacrifices should be offered only to God.<sup>46</sup>

The differences in shrine practices indicate significant distinctions in the character of the cultural logics generating Islamic practices in different cultural contexts. This is a large problem and I do not attempt to do the topic justice here. However there are three issues related to saint worship on which the different cultures appear to have distinct positions. These issues are intercession, **baraka** - grace, and the folk/orthodox dichotomy. I have already argued that the intercessionary character of the

---

<sup>45</sup> I witnessed one of these occasions when two young bulls were sacrificed for the sake of an extended household. One of the animals was led through one family members house and into all the rooms before it was taken outside to be killed. The inhabitants stated that this was to remove all the "bad luck". Both animals were slaughtered some distance from the house and none of the meat from the first animal was kept by the family. In order for this sacrifice to be effective all the meat had to be given away. With the other animal as was the custom 1/3 of the meat was kept by the family, 1/3 given to relatives and 1/3 as alms to the poor.

<sup>46</sup> However Crapanzano (ibid) does not discuss the symbolic significance of particular gifts at different shrines so this is speculation on my part.

understanding of shrine practice is not immediately applicable in Sri Lanka. I now turn to the concept of baraka or grace that is a fundamental element in the structure of Moroccan shrine practice and far less featured in Sri Lanka. Muslims in Sri Lanka are far more likely to associate the concept of **karamat** - miracles with the shrines of their saints.<sup>47</sup> An explicit purpose of shrine pilgrimages in Morocco is to obtain some of the saint's baraka. This baraka according to Moroccans is associated with a **silsila** (chain) of relationships traced through the patriline of the saint, and reflected in some measure through the wealth and popularity of his lineage and his shrine. In Sri Lanka there are no shrines which stand at the heart of a lineage group among whose membership may exist one or more saints. There are thus no occasions where the baraka of a shrine saint is embodied by members of the lineage. Saints are acknowledged to possess baraka but saints have no connections to local kin groups and this is the basis of a significant distinction in the two concepts of baraka. In Morocco baraka is continuously evident amongst members of the saintly lineages whereas in Sri Lanka it remains the province of the saint in his tomb. The only "lineage" resembling a Moroccan saintly lineage in Sri Lanka are the various Moulana families who trace their descent from the prophet and they do not constitute a definable lineage or corporate group on the ground.<sup>48</sup> The chain of patrilineal relationships which connects them to the prophet is termed a **silsila**, and this word also refers to the documented evidence of such a genealogical relationship which all Moulana families should hold.<sup>49</sup> This group as a whole is worthy of certain communal respect on account of their connection with the Prophet, and where they are

---

<sup>47</sup> Glassé terms karamat "acts of generosity" or "spiritual powers acquired by a saint", short of miracles (ibid:219). The term karamat however is glossed as miracles in the South Asian discourse (Gaborieau, 1992:221).

<sup>48</sup> They would prefer to marry endogamously but their numbers are limited and many families do not. The Moulana status passes through the male line and thus any children of a Moulana male will themselves be Moulanas. In line with my general argument about the greater orthodoxy of the South-west coast informants report that Moulanas there endeavour to marry their daughters to other Moulanas and East Coast Moulanas are reportedly not as concerned.

<sup>49</sup> I was told that very few Moulana families actually hold a silsila. I saw only one and it traced the relationships from all members of the current family back to the Prophet and before him to Adam.



educated in Islamic matters their advice should be sought. They are not saints however, and most of them have no particular religious function at all, unlike Morocco where a large number of the saints fall into this category (sherfa/sherif) (Gellner, 1969; 70). In Morocco the baraka is passed equally from a father to all his sons and Gellner argues that this diffusion of grace creates pressures which lead to large numbers of these saints becoming "laicised" - members of the laity, where their baraka remains latent (ibid; 142-145). This again contrasts strongly with Sri Lanka where living saints are a rarity. In fact I only ever knew one and his following was in India where he stood as a foreigner in relation to them, although his holiness was widely accepted in his home country. The significance of foreign origins will be explored below but first I will briefly explore the concept of baraka in relation to the saint. This particular saint was from a Moulana family and came as he said "from a long line of saints" who originated in Iraq and one of whom migrated to India in the late nineteenth century. The baraka, or saintly grace had come to the current saint from his father who in turn had received it from his father. However this man was the youngest of three brothers and it was he who received the baraka and not his brothers. The baraka was understood to pass directly from saint to saint and in this instance the saintliness had manifested itself in the youngest son. The pattern of attaining baraka in this case shares the logic of the spiritual chain or silsila, believed to exist between Sufis and their disciples, where it is manifest in terms of an individual spirituality rather than as a genealogical sense of grace. But it is either transferred through the male lineage or directly between saints or Sufis. Without the lineage group located in the vicinity of the shrine as in Morocco, there is in Sri Lanka where saints are not associated with lineage groups at all, no direct association of the tomb with the idea of baraka.

The governing concept associated with the Sri Lankan shrines is that of karamat. The logic of "windows to heaven" outlined above receives further emphasis through the many miracles that take place in the vicinity of the tombs. There are two types of miracles associated with all the tombs. First are the original miracles which led to the discovery of each and every tomb and the establishment of a shrine and mosque. Second are the continual stream of cures and boons that are achieved through prayer here. Or more precisely through prayers "directed" here. Since to offer a vow initially it is merely necessary to intend the name and place of the saint and the

promised vow. This logic of directional prayer is akin to that which underlies the orientation of all daily prayers towards Mecca for instance. The tomb itself is of course oriented towards Mecca and Mecca itself is understood to be a point of conjunction between heaven and earth. The Ka'bah is understood to stand immediately below its heavenly replica which is circumambulated continuously by angels in the same manner as the pilgrims move around the Ka'bah on earth. The city itself is haram - forbidden and non-muslims are not permitted to enter it. The pilgrims must wear the special pilgrim garb within the precincts of the holy mosque itself and they are under special restrictions as to their conduct. This is "sacred space" par excellence, and although it is of a much higher order it nonetheless shares the same logic of space and relation to heaven as that of the shrines.

It is another curious fact that many of these ziyarrams in the island are not confined to the dimensions of a normal human being but achieve great length. Some of the saints upon revealing themselves have stated their physical dimensions which must be reflected in the size of the tomb above. Some of them have been enormous. Many other shrines have tombs which continue to "grow" in line with their popularity. Thus the tomb in Trincomalee is held to be 60 cubits long and growing and one at Panadura is 40 cubits. Another one located at Poruwa near Akuressa is already 30 feet long and it also has a miraculous chain hanging from the roof which has three links to it and these are growing down towards the ground. When they finally reach the floor this will mark the imminent end of the world. This miraculous shift in dimensions within a space which is sacred and in line with its popularity echoes entirely the logic of the dimensions of the mosque at Mecca. According to informants if ever the pilgrimage crowd is too large the angels simply extend the dimensions of the Mosque to incorporate everybody.

The final area of distinction is the structure of the "folk": "orthodox" dichotomy. This has been found repeatedly in the past in studies of Islam and religion generally and the current approach appears to be towards a more holistic view. Thus saints shrines for instance have been in many cases relegated to the status of a folk Islam and discussed as an aberration, not on a par with formalised scriptural Islam. I have argued above that within the Sri Lankan context the shrines are seen as orthodox in themselves - and shrine practices are favourably regarded although by no means, does



everybody participate. Shrine practice is often closely associated with mosque feasts held annually in all the mosques. The cultural logic of the shrines is shared with the logic found elsewhere in the Islamic ideology. However, that aside, I want to point out that there do exist dichotomies for the Muslims themselves between different practices within Islam. Eickelman uses the term "part-ideologies" to refer to the ideology behind maraboutic practices, to highlight the fact that these practices are seen by some as inconsistent with the ideas of Muslim reformists. Thus certain believers may be led to dis-avow their belief in shrine practices in contemporary contexts. This "part-ideology is never found in isolation, but co-exists with formal Islamic ideology" (ibid:6). Because it overlaps with locally maintained assumptions about the social order it functions as a "conservative" ideology, it has no need of defense or conscious articulation since its legitimation is "the way things are". He goes on to argue that the conjuncture of conflicting patterns of belief can be found in most of the world's religions. He identifies a locally drawn distinction between a "formal Islam" on the one hand and "shrine practices" on the other. Those who worship at the shrines consider all their practices to be Islamic but they are aware that others of a more reformist character would term the shrine practices as un-Islamic. Islam in Sri Lanka has its reformists also and they regard some of the cultural practices such as dowry giving, and some of the ecstatic Sufi practices as not in keeping with an "orthodox" Islam. But there is more significantly a reformist character to Sri Lankan Islam as a whole, in large measure due to their perception of themselves as permanently located on the periphery of the Islamic world. Thus there are local distinctions drawn between "folk" and "Islamic" practices but these are generally expressed in terms of 'custom' versus 'religion', and always associated with the concept of converted indigenous women and foreign Muslim men. This apparent dichotomy has numerous formulations for individuals in this cultural context, but most importantly it is always in the process of being overcome. It has none of the conceptual strength of a structuralist opposition and should not be used as a fundamental analytical tool without the recognition that above all it indicates an orientation to the world, that orientation of a people whose constant concern is the reproduction of an Islamic world.

#### 4.6 The Regional Myths.

When turning to the islands in the immediate South Asian region, those of the Maldives and the Laccadives, we find that the myths of the saints reveal the foreign Muslim saint as a critical figure in the **conversion** of the population to Islam. In this region, conversion often implies both the construction of a new Muslim ethnic identity and the arrival of orthodox Islam itself. Thus a study of Islam in this particular region calls for an initial analysis of the saints myths in order to examine the ideological base of the 'orthodox' community.

Placed in the context of the saints myths from other island communities in the immediate region the Sri Lankan myths reveal significant distinctions. The Maldives (formerly Buddhist) and the Laccadives (formerly Hindu) are two groups of islands in the Central Indian Ocean which now have entirely Muslim populations. The people of the Maldives share ethnic and cultural links with the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka (Forbes, 1981:88), while those of the Laccadives (the Mappilas) were originally Hindus of the Kerala region.<sup>50</sup> The Maldives are located on the direct sea-route between Southern Arabia, Sri Lanka and the Far East, and the Laccadives lie on the direct route between Southern Arabia and South India. Both sets of islands were incorporated into the Arab trading networks at the same time as Sri Lanka.

All the myths share certain ideological aspects with regard to the **originary** status of the saints, and their role in relation to the Islamic communities. Yet the distinctions between them reveal certain cultural understandings which reflect in each case the distinct nature of their Islam. Further the particular historical arguments embedded in the myths reflect in vastly different ways, their different cosmological worlds. The myths provide valuable evidence about the different patterns of conversion to Islam in the region. More specifically however, they outline how they are to be understood to be different. There is no case in which Islam may be interpreted as simply an overlay, atop an original cultural world. In each case Islam has been incorporated transformatively, through a complex dialectical relation with the given cultural context. The myths reveal distinct ideologies of the construction of new Muslim

---

<sup>50</sup> Minicoy Island which is part of the Laccadive group, belongs ethnically and culturally to the Maldives (Forbes, *ibid*).



communities. My focus here is quite clearly on the myths and the various cultural arguments they essay about the conversions of respective populations. In this sense they offer (to the analyst, as too, the culturally embedded individual) a primary source of access to a cosmological view of particular cultural worlds, all of them Islamic.

In the Maldives and the Laccadives, the myths encode an argument about the conversion of the population to Islam. In Sri Lanka by contrast, the myths are primarily about the deepening of links in the phenomenal world, between the island and its already existent place in the Arabic cosmology. There is therefore a pre-ordained and primordial link between the island and Arabic Islam. The conversion themes in the myths below from the Laccadives and Maldives make explicit the cultural view of **Muslim identity**. The myths outline in each case the construction of a specific ethnic Muslim identity. Given the different original ethnic identities of the Buddhist Maldives and the Hindu Laccadives, we may see clearly that Islam was never simply an overlay atop old ethnic and religious systems. When contrasted with the Sri Lankan myths the differences in mythic arguments and the distinct forms of transformation in each case are so unique, as to render any simple assumptions about the universality of Muslim saints and shrine practice, being a single phenomenon, totally untenable. The only means of comparison is to examine the ideologies behind the practices. Once this is undertaken, any focus on shrine practice, shifts from a central analytical concern with intercession, to questions of identity. I will return to this point below.

#### **The Maldives.**

The last Buddhist Raja of the Maldives is believed to have converted to Islam in 1153AD and established the Maldivian Sultanate. The saint who converted the Raja is currently entombed in the **Medu Ziyare** (Central Shrine) in the capital, Male. In one myth<sup>51</sup>, the conversion is ascribed

by Ibn Battuta ... to a wandering Maghrebi **shaykh** and **hafiz** called Abu al-Barakat al-Barbari, who through his piety was able to rid the islands of an evil, virgin-ravishing demon ('**ifrit**) (Forbes 1983:47).

---

<sup>51</sup> There are three versions of the myth (cf below) ascribing the conversion to a Maghrebi, a Persian, and a Muslim shaykh respectively. There is however only one shrine.

Another version attributed the conversion to a Persian **alim**, Maulana Shaykh Yusuf Shams al-Din Tabrizi

who performed numerous miracles to win the Maldives for Islam, the most impressive of which was the raising of a colossal **jinni** "whose head almost touched the sky" (Forbes, *ibid*:op cit, cites Bell, 1940:19).<sup>52</sup>

The third version, from a Weligama Muslim, states that the Buddhist people of the Maldives were at the mercy of a demon who demanded the sacrifice of a virgin each year. A visiting Muslim shaykh who was told of the problem tricked the demon by luring it into a pot which he quickly sealed and threw far into the sea. The islanders were so relieved and so impressed with his powers that they converted to Islam.<sup>53</sup> Having converted the Raja and his people, the shaykh built the first mosque and remained in the Maldives. His tomb in Medu Ziyare is attached to the **Medu Miskit** (Central mosque) and both sites are regarded with great reverence.<sup>54</sup> The conversion of the Raja was followed by the conversion of his family, his court and finally - the people. The conversion of the Buddhist Raja into a Muslim Sultan, made Islam the **state religion**. Official backing, through the seizure of lands belonging to those who remained Buddhist and the destruction of Buddhist idols ensured its rapid spread (Forbes *ibid*:48). Once

---

<sup>52</sup> Forbes argues that it is most likely that the first shaykh came from the Maghreb and not Tabriz, as he introduced the **Maliki madhhab** (*ibid*:71,ff 28). The introduction of the **Shafi madhhab** was not until the sixteenth century (*ibid*:68).

<sup>53</sup> The informant who related this version of the myth was a 'talsimar' worker, a ritual specialist and maker of talismans. He pointed out that he uses a similar logic in some of his exorcist practices. He ties a thread to his patient and attaches the other end to a small bottle and then lures the demon (**jinn**) along the thread and traps it in the bottle. Trapping demons in pots (which are metonymic with wombs) is entirely consistent with Buddhist exorcist practice (Kapferer 1983, Russell, p.c.), but the possible associations of **jinn** (genies) in bottles should not be overlooked.

<sup>54</sup> In 1921 Bell noted that "at the conclusion of the noon-day service on Friday at the Hukuru Miskit (Jumma Mosque), the sultan and other members of the royal family recite the **fatiha** in front of the closed portico entrance (of the shrine)" (Bell, *ibid*, cited Forbes, 1983:60). There are seven days only, when the sultan may cross the threshold to worship inside, and the only other visitors are the heads of foreign diplomatic missions (*ibid*:61). It is not stated, but I assume that these are the heads of **Muslim** foreign diplomatic missions since non-Muslims are not permitted to stand on the **haram** (forbidden) ground of the mosques. This shares a similar logic with that reported for the Ka'bah, where on the day of creation in the month of Ashura, Muslim heads of state enter and sweep it out. The link is between Muslim heads of state and points of Islamic origin.



outside the new Islamic state, Buddhism suffered at its hands.<sup>55</sup> The hierarchical social order laid out geographically in the earlier system of distinct wards (*avaru*), for royalty and commoners (ibid:57) was maintained. Thus certain cemeteries were reserved for the nobility (ibid:58) and certain mosques for the militia and royalty (ibid:60). A description of the *Hukuru Miskit* (Jumma Mosque) in Male by Pyrard, a castaway in the Maldives from 1602-7, indicates that hierarchy was maintained in this mosque where the community gathered for Friday prayers. There was a separate enclosure for the Sultan, a relative bearing his sword and shield, the *qadi*, *khateeb* and four *Moudins*. Two large galleries were set aside for the soldiers and their captain, and within the body of the mosque "there (were) partitioned spaces for .. persons .. of a certain order, estate. age or quality" (ibid:54-56). This order was rigorously maintained through the sanction of fines for transgressors (ibid, op cit).

All versions of the myth attribute the conversion of the population to the powers of the saint. Thus the origin of Islam in these Buddhist islands was due to a Muslim saint who demonstrated his ability to encompass the demonic. It is an ideological statement concerning the supreme power of Islam over the demonic forces of a fragmented Buddhist state. (A fragmentation we may assume from the extreme manifestation of the demonic.) The Persian alim was further believed to be

the most religious God-fearing chief of saints of that age, who was acquainted with the hidden secrets of the everlasting world (...and...) whose knowledge was as deep as the ocean (Bell, ibid:203, cited in Forbes, ibid:47).

This further stresses that the *agent* of conversion, was himself the purest embodiment of Islam - a "chief of saints" (loc cit). The myth also describes the conversion of a Buddhist *state*, embodied in the person of the Raja. By saving the people from the demands of a "virgin-ravishing" demon, the saint provides the moment of transformation, of the fragmented hierarchical state. The Raja converts, and establishes the transformed state - the Sultanate. The Sultan, who embodies the new order, re-orders the community and restores its wholeness. The Sultan remains at the apex of the state,

---

<sup>55</sup> Kapferer (1988) has outlined the movement of the hierarchical state against those who remain outside it. In this instance a religious transformation at the apex of the state, rendered Buddhists who were formerly encompassed by the Buddhist state, outside it, and the legitimate target of its aggression.

and the embodiment of both the people and the state. The Raja is the **first convert** (as the Divine King), and the process of conversion moves downwards. The conversion of the Raja is followed in hierarchical order, by the conversion of his family, his court and then the people. This hierarchical process of conversion is entirely consistent with the hierarchical process outlined by Kapferer (ibid) within the Sinhalese Buddhist state.<sup>56</sup> The transformed hierarchical Islamic state begins to legitimately act against those who do not convert, thus signing themselves as standing outside it, and therefore allied with the demonic. The myth behind the central saint's shrine, the originary shrine within the Maldives<sup>57</sup>, both reflects and reproduces the cultural context of conversion.

### **The Laccadives**

In this myth from Kutty (1972:6) conversion of the islands is attributed to **Ubaidulla**<sup>58</sup> a grandson of Abubakr, the first Caliph of Islam. He had a dream in which the Prophet appeared to him and sent him on a voyage to propagate Islam. As a result of the dream he set out from the Hijaz but was shipwrecked and cast ashore on Amini Island in the Hindu Laccadives. There he met a local woman, "the daughter of a high-caste Hindu family" (Forbes, ibid:86) who embraced Islam, and he married her.<sup>59</sup> The islanders were infuriated by her conversion and marriage, and attempted to kill Ubaidulla. The couple were miraculously transported to Androth island but again they met a hostile reception. When the Androth islanders also tried to kill Ubaidulla a miraculous earthquake occurred and the people converted to Islam.<sup>60</sup> The myth outlines Ubaidulla's visits to all of the other inhabited islands in the Laccadive group. In every case there was a further miracle which enticed the inhabitants to convert to Islam.

---

<sup>56</sup> The hierarchical state is one in which identity is achieved through hierarchy. See Kapferer (ibid) for further comment upon "identity within hierarchy" and "hierarchical process".

<sup>57</sup> A shrine whose custodian is the Maldivian Sultan, as King Fahd of Saudi Arabia remains custodian of the Ka'bah; both are state shrines.

<sup>58</sup> Alternatively 'Ubaid Allah (Forbes, 1981:83).

<sup>59</sup> She was known as Hameedath Beebi (Mukundan, 1979:30).

<sup>60</sup> The spot where the couple were first sighted after their miraculous transportation from Amini is marked (Mukundan, ibid, op cit).



In each of the islands that he visited, Ubaidulla established a Jumma Mosque, but he settled and spent his later years in Androth (Kutty ibid:7), where he is now regarded as a saint and entombed in the Jumma mosque (Ellis 1924:16). Ubaidulla established the **Khaziship of Androth** which his family held until 1920. This office was held "in the greatest veneration throughout the islands" (Ellis, ibid; op cit) and Androth itself is regarded as the "citadel of orthodoxy" (Mukundan, ibid:44). This myth also essays a very clear argument about the establishment of Islam on the island, through the miraculous arrival of a doyen of orthodox Middle Eastern Islam in the grandson of the first Caliph. His was an **originary** journey directed by the prophet, and through his saintly powers he converted the islands. He also established the religious spaces (Jumma Mosques) and the sacred governing structure (the Khaziship) of orthodox Islam.

In the case of both the Maldives and the Laccadives, foreign saints converted the populations and established the first mosques.<sup>61</sup> However, while in the Maldives the conversion of the Raja transformed an hierarchical Buddhist state into a sultanate, in which the transformed sultan remained the new head of the religious order, in the Laccadives the saint married a local high-caste woman and founded a "religious dynasty" in the Khaziship.<sup>62</sup> It would appear that there

---

<sup>61</sup> Mosques to which their shrines were later attached, thus sanctifying them even further by making them a point of direct access to Heaven.

<sup>62</sup> It may be possible to argue that this was in essence, a transformation of a priestly caste (Brahmans) into the "priesthood" of Islam. Ubaidulla (the Caliph's grandson) married a high-caste (Brahman) woman and his male descendants assumed the highest positions in the new religious order. This is reflected in the current caste structure of the island; the Thangals (moulanas/People of the Prophet) are the transformed matrilineal Nambiduri Brahmans and head of a three-tiered caste structure **Koya, Malmi** and **Melacheri** (which governs religious duties). The Koyas are the land-owning class, Malmis are sailors and Melacheris are labourers (Forbes, 1978:24).

The myth has an even deeper level of meaning when it is linked to the original myth of settlement of these islands. A linking which suggests (as with Ceylon) a pre-ordained conversion of the islands in question. The original settlement of the Laccadives is attributed to the followers of Cheruman Perumal, the last King of Malabar. He had a dream in which he saw the moon splitting in half and then becoming whole again. This dream was interpreted for him by Muslims in the Kingdom and as a result he embraced Islam, divided his kingdom into eighteen parts and set forth on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Ships were sent after him to persuade him to return but were shipwrecked in a great storm and the survivors washed up on the Laccadive islands (Forbes, ibid:82 ff98, Kutty, ibid:6). (See Mukundan, ibid:61, for the



is a definite link between **identity** and the type of conversion outlined in the myths. In the Maldives, where the supreme head of state converted, national ethnic identity remained intact and conversion was embodied in the King.<sup>63</sup> In the case of the Laccadives the grandson of the first Caliph of Islam was ship-wrecked and married a local Hindu woman and a new ethnic identity arose. Thus in the Laccadives the islanders are Moppilas, a particular ethnic identity which arose from intermarriage between Arabs and local women. The social order of caste was maintained, but the people came to constitute a new ethnic category.<sup>64</sup> The Sri Lankan myths are remarkably distinct and the saints are clearly not agents of conversion. Rather they legitimate a Muslim presence on the island and institute an originary, orthodox, Islamic practice.

#### 4.7 The Question of Identity.

The significance of the Muslim saints and religious practice at the shrines has been analysed in a variety of ways. Two major points of focus are clear however. The first is an examination of the **saints** and their association with the Sufi brotherhoods, an approach which links these religious practices with men. The second is an examination of the **shrines** of local saints linked to particular territories, an approach which concludes that the burden of worship lies with women. In both instances the "ecstatic" practices of the former and the "non-normative" practices of the latter have contributed to the overall classification of saints shrines as elements of popular Islam.

---

views of a rationalist sceptic on this myth).

<sup>63</sup> The process of 'state conversion' that I am proposing shares some similarities with Geertz' work in Java but presents further analytical possibilities. In fact state conversion itself provides both an over-arching ideology which contains so-called syncretic practices - "The Doctrine of Graded Spirituality" (1971:36) and also, allows the idea of the state a greater historical role post conversion to Islam. Mataram was the transformed Islamic state, modelled upon Madjapahit. The conversion of an hierachical state allows, indeed calls for, absolute, unadulterated purity at the apex - "the Exemplary Centre" (ibid, loc cit) and this is cogently reflected in the myths from Java and the Maldives.

<sup>64</sup> The Laccadive islanders are a matrilineal people, but the Thangals trace religious descent patrilineally, in accordance with the ideology of Islam. See Dube (1969) and Forbes (1978) for discussions of this apparent contradiction.



The **local** base of the saints orients many analysts to exclude them from normative/orthodox, **universal** Islamic practice. This raises the question of the significance of the saints in the establishment, and/or reproduction of distinct local identities. That the burden of this worship is often laid upon the women would suggest that they have a particular role in the identity and reproduction of the social group. In patrilineal societies with virilocal residence this proves an interesting counterpoint to construction of identity. The construction and reproduction of identity has been a focus of much anthropological analysis and I do not deny its complexity. Here however I am specifically concerned with the role of the saints and the particular significance of saints in the establishment of local and/or regional identity. In much analysis of the local saints shrines the saint is seen as reinforcing an older tribal or local identity which has at some level been transformed by the adoption of Islam in some cases and the transformation of Islam in others. Unfortunately the case with most scholars is to deny the complexity of the situation from the outset and see the apparent contradictions as evidence of syncretism. The ideology of Islam is actually concretely concerned with the maintenance of kin groups and the progressive incorporation of vast difference, essayed in some Islamic ritual, proves that initial difference is unproblematic. Those studies which deal with the shrine phenomenon as aspects of the reproduction of a local identity tend to stress the opposition between shrine practice and orthodox Islam at worst, and the syncretic incorporation of popular religion into Islam at best. Such an approach is untenable from the outset in the South Asian region where **saints are arguably the vehicles of the establishment of orthodox Islam** in the region. They establish a new Muslim identity and form the base of the new orthodox Islamic community. Another assumption behind much analytic interpretation of saint **worship** is that this practice lies by definition outside orthodox practice in a religion which professes a strict mono-theism.

Van Binsbergen (1980) argues that the Tunisian saints "straddle" a popular/formal Islamic dichotomy. His analysis discerns a segmentary base to kinship structures allied to a territorial occupation which is "mirrored" in the location of shrines and the patterns of practice surrounding them. As the segmentary groups increase in size so also there are saints with wider and wider spheres of influence. In his arguments saints are intimately associated with the construction and maintenance of local identity and they have a specifically unifying

function. The saints are treated as "ancestors", (though in only a few cases are they held to be the actual ancestors of a kinship segment) and they are referred to by honorific kin-terms as grandfathers or grandmothers of the groups. As ancestors these saints require respect. The saints through the engagement of/expression of, a local area and/or tribal group - have been understood as reifying a local identity in opposition to the universal brotherhood of Islam. In fact saints in this ethnographic area have often been politically unifying figures in both local and anti-colonial conflicts (Evans-Pritchard, 1949, Peters, 1990).

The Sri Lankan situation is one which reflects first and foremost its spatial role in an early Islamic Arabian cosmology.<sup>65</sup> As I have explained earlier, Adam's Peak was revered by Arabs as the place where Adam first set foot on earth when he left Paradise.<sup>66</sup> This is reflected in the Arabic name for the island - Serendib. It had long been a site of pilgrimage for Arabs. The most famous Muslim pilgrim being Ibn Battuta (who also spent five years married to four wives in the Maldives) (1983)<sup>Forbes</sup>. Arab settlement in the island is widely held to pre-date Islam. (It is also certain that some degree of Arabic inter-marriage had occurred prior to the 1153 Maldivian conversion also. A fact which H.C.P. Bell argues would "smooth the way towards the firm establishment on the islands of the faith in the power of Islam" (Bell, 1940:17, cited Forbes, 1981:88). That this may be part of historical fact for other communities, but is not enshrined in myth as cosmological argument is significant.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> The term "Arabian" is a gloss here.

<sup>66</sup> It is not insignificant that Adam's Peak was the first navigational sign of the island - a point of great significance to mariners. This symbolic significance may be further strengthened by its association with the Manik Ganga (Gem River) in an island known to the Arabs for its rubies. The name Taprobane means red sands. The peak stands at the head of the island's four major rivers - this contributing to its sacred significance in primarily Hindu but also Buddhist cosmology. I am not suggesting a purely functional relationship to the significance of the Peak - navigational aid = symbolic significance, rather I am pointing out that its multiple significances reinforce its original cosmological position.

<sup>67</sup> The critical difference here is that between the conversion of a minority or majority of the population. This requires further comparative study in the region.



The Sri Lankan Muslims have, and always will be a minority religious population. Here the action of the saints is to purify an already existent Moor (Arab-local ethnic group) and post-Islam, Muslim community in a very unique way. In both types of myth the veracity of the saint's holiness or his foreign origins is both critical and undisputed. One group came from Middle Eastern countries as already dead saints travelling miraculously upon the waves to the island where they were later entombed at the point of man's origin on earth. The others were Middle Eastern Muslims who had come on pilgrimage to Adam's Peak, many of whom were reputed to be so attracted by the climate and scenic beauty of the jungle that they had stayed many years in meditation.<sup>68</sup> These graves were most often revealed later through miracles on the spot or simply a revelation in a dream to a local Muslim who then undertook to build a shrine.

Together both sets of myths account for the shrines on the coast and in the interior and stake out the entire island as a place where Muslims might practice their Islam. They also clearly reflect the two major patterns of Muslim trade in the island. Firstly the coastal settlements and trading associated with the major trade routes on the seas. Second the Muslims who traded in the interior, many of whom would have been concerned with petty trade but also the gem traders whose business would have led them to Adam's Peak in the heart of the gem district. The argument of the myths does much more than simply legitimate the presence of the Muslim community on the island, rather it creates them as a community located in a particular space in an Islamic cosmology. The Muslims here construct their history in the context of other communities (Sinhalese and Tamil) whose own concerns with their history are profoundly ideological. The ideology of the myths explains the cosmological and historical attachments of Muslims and their practices to Sri Lanka. It sacrifices the island, reclaims Paradise, subordinates culture to religion and above all incorporates periphery with centre.

---

<sup>68</sup> The fact that pilgrims did arrive reinforced the idea that the island was significant in an Arabic cosmology.

## Chapter Five:

### Mosques and Symbolic Communities

The Muslim community of Weligama perceives itself as a relatively orthodox community of long standing. A critical component of this view is the belief that there have always been Arabic speakers here, since the days when Weligama was a site of early Arab settlement. As argued in the previous chapter, symbolic connections to the Middle East are a significant part of Sri Lankan Islamic practice and consequently, fluency with Arabic has great religious value. This reputation as a centre of orthodoxy has a currency well beyond the town itself and elsewhere in the island people refer to the town as one of the more orthodox sites of Muslim settlement; one in which young men are trained as religious leaders and where the purdah requirements are observed with far more rigour than elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Islam is the fundamental element of this community's identity and they take their Islamic ideology very seriously. My analysis therefore, concentrates upon the ideological dimensions of religious practice within the community. Islamic ideology is primarily directed towards the creation of the perfect egalitarian community of believers - the *ummah*, and this is also the explicit focus of much religious practice. The ideology of Islamic egalitarianism is a crucial element of local religious discourse and community practice. The community is not however, monolithic in its views but rather is alive with debate and contrasting opinions and religious practice is by no means uniform. In order to comprehend the reality of this

---

<sup>1</sup> I encountered comments about the orthodoxy of Weligama in Colombo, on the East Coast at Kalmunai and all along the Southern and South-western coasts. This reputation is clearly generated within the structure of understanding of the arrival of the religion on the island. I have argued earlier that the South-western coast has many sites of early Arab settlement in particular, Beruwela, Alutgama and Weligama. (I find it somewhat surprising that Galle does not seem to have quite the sacred significance that one might have expected.) It is critical to understand that the current and historical dominance of the island-wide Muslim community has been in the hands of those on the SW coast and they produce their religious and economic dominance through these shared understandings. In contrast to my data however, a colleague reports that Muslims in the Kandyan area also understand themselves as 'orthodox' (Jones, p.c.). Working as he did, within the *Tabliq* movement perhaps this claim should be understood as more *fundamental* (modern, puritan, revivalist) than *orthodox* (historically legitimated through a direct Arabic connection). This latter orthodoxy was itself buttressed by a turn of the century revivalism.



existence it is essential to examine in detail facets of an extremely diverse and dense religious life. In this chapter I explore organized religion 'on the ground' in the context of Weligama. I begin with an examination of the meaning of the mosque within the Muslim community and those religious practices centred upon the mosque. The mosque encloses a **space**, where all men are equal, and its 'order' presents the central values of the Muslim community. Islamic ideology represents the fundamental dimensions of egalitarian existence. The focus on space and ideology in this chapter leads to a discussion of egalitarian religious practice in the next chapter.

### 5.1 The Meaning of the Mosque.

The religious community of Islam revolves around the mosque. This is the space at the heart of the Muslim community. There are two types of mosques however, and two levels of engagement of Muslims with the mosque. The first type of mosque is the **village mosque** where men perform their individual "five times" prayers (**salat/namaz**), in accordance with the second Pillar of Islam.<sup>2</sup> The second type of mosque is the **Jumma (Friday) mosque**, which all men must attend for communal Friday prayers. Each mosque reveals a different level of **identity** within the community as I shall explain below. Within the mosque none of the status or wealth differences of the wider social world are permitted to intrude. Islam lays great stress on equality within the community of believers and Muslims constantly state that "All men are equal before God". The religion therefore has no sacraments and requires no special class of priests to effect its rituals or its individual worship. The mosque, (**masjid**) is fundamentally a house of prayer (**masjid** - literally, the place of prostration), and may be taken as symbolic of the Islamic community itself. Ideally the mosque should be located at the centre of the village and all Muslim dwellings should be located within hearing range of the **azan** - "the call to prayer", which issues from the

---

<sup>2</sup> The Five Pillars of Islam are :- (1) The **Shadadah (Kalimah)** - affirming that "there is no God but God (Allah) and that Muhammad is his prophet", (2) **Salat** - prayer, five times daily, (3) **Zakat** - the giving of alms, (4) **Saum** - fasting (T- *nombu*) during the month of Ramadan, and (5) The **Hajj** pilgrimage to Mecca.

mosque.<sup>3</sup> Thus at the ideological level each Muslim community is defined by a mosque and all houses stand in relation to a particular mosque. The situation on the ground mirrors the ideological prescription. The greater Muslim community of the research area must be seen as composed of a series of smaller communities each distinguished by its own mosque. Areas of Muslim and Buddhist settlement are interspersed throughout the town's urban centre and surrounding rural environs. The mosques define the Muslim community externally and distinguish them from the majority Buddhists and few Christians with whom they share the area. In this multi-ethnic context the significance of the mosque as an external symbol of local religious identity has been clearly attested to historically. During the 1915 riots three mosques in this area were destroyed by Sinhalese Buddhists.<sup>4</sup> The mosques also differentiate the Muslim community internally, into distinct "communities" or villages. This internal social differentiation has elements of rank to it, borne of historical and current, relative economic and political position. This presents a constant source of tension between the ideal of Islamic egalitarianism on the one hand and the reality of wealth, class and rank distinctions on the other.

In this country mosques are generally the ambit of males and the locale for the expression of male religious practice whilst female religious practice is more often located within the home. This

---

<sup>3</sup> On hearing the *azan* women in their houses quickly cover their heads with the end of their saris or with their shawls, until it is completed. If they are engaged in conversation at the time, both men and women stop speaking in order not to prevent anyone else from hearing it. Conversation resumes immediately it is finished.

<sup>4</sup> Two were damaged and one was completely destroyed. The Koledande/Palathaddi Mosque, which was 700 years old and formerly a Jumma mosque, was destroyed with dynamite. This mosque has since been rebuilt but is no longer a Jumma mosque. The Meera Shahib mosque in Station Road was damaged and the saint's tomb has gone. Attacks were also mounted against the mosque and tomb at Kaparatota (see previous Chapter). The mosque at Koledande was the oldest mosque in the area and before the building of the "coast road" during the British period, all traffic from Galle went through Koledande to Akuressa, and from there to Matara, or Kumburipitya and the interior. Koledande (Sinhala - from keledande - jungle bridge) or Palathaddi (Tamil - under the bridge/low bridge) was located by the bridge which crossed the Polwatha Ganga on the road to Akuressa. Akuressa itself, on the main Southern trunk road between Galle and Matara was always an important trading post historically.



clearly divides the community into two groups; male and female. All mosques, by definition, are open to all Muslim men and in this sense from one village to the next, all mosques may be seen as "male spaces" and share an equivalent identity. The rules of matrilocal residence however determine that a man, upon the occasion of his marriage, will often shift his place of regular worship to the mosque in his wife's village, where he will pray with her father and brothers. So although we may see mosques as "male spaces", it should be noted that in this cultural context it is women who primarily determine which mosque a man stands in relation to. A man's natal village mosque is determined by his mother and his later village mosque is determined by his wife.

It is the Jumma mosque and the practice of the Jumma prayer - the group of men who pray together weekly, that constitutes the fundamental unit of the egalitarian religious community. Jumma communal prayers are in stark contrast to the individual male prayers offered in the village mosque and it is the practice of the Jumma congregational prayer which most cogently expresses the egalitarian ideal. It is here that men in a similar state of ritual purity, offer their prayers as an undifferentiated group. It is here, as the ideologues claim, that "the rich may rub shoulders with the poor". The rows are filled as men arrive and no hierarchy is observed. The class, wealth, and status distinctions of everyday life outside the Jumma are suspended, albeit temporarily. Gerholm (1977) argues of the Jumma prayers in a Yemeni town that social status differentials are maintained and that

it would be going too far to describe the interaction in the mosque as a truly egalitarian counterpoint to the hierarchical melody played on the other side of the walls (ibid:176).

In this caste based, hierarchical, cultural context however, the ideological weight of a ritual suspension of status differentials is far greater and the assertion of egalitarianism in the Jumma prayer is more radical.

The egalitarianism of the Jumma permits the poor to continually seek the companionship of the rich, on the basis of **equality**. Because everyone, potentially, meets in the Jumma, internal fissioning in the community does not lead (immediately) to complete break-away. The Jumma acts as a centripetal tendency countering the centrifugal tendency of the effects of class formation. Within the Jumma the poor

are continually bound to the rich, and function to make the rich wealthier. This ideological distortion of reality in Islam may account (in part) for the continued acceptance of wealth gaps within the community.<sup>5</sup> The wealthy, although they may be critically regarded by others, are nonetheless protected to some extent by the widespread idea "that Allah gives to those who please him", and thus their wealth is perceived to be legitimate. The wealthy are also expected to provide for the poor within the community and in a sense, individual profit, through the Jumma, becomes communal profit.

It is here, at the Jumma sermon - *khutbah* that issues of political import within the religious community may be voiced and the sermons may also serve as a platform for the dominant points of view. Far from a situation in which the *imams* - prayer leaders, speak with all the authority of Islamic law behind them, there are many in the villages who freely and publicly disagree with the opinions expressed in the sermons. One imam was consistently declared to be "an irritating idiot" by a particular informant and there were many others who took issue with prevailing opinion at various points. In Kapuwatta the sermons are broadcast over the loudspeaker and on occasion remarks may be addressed directly to the women in their homes. One woman told of such a sermon, against abortion, in which the imam declared that an act to prevent conception itself could be tolerated, but that once a pregnancy was established, to resort to abortion was against the laws of Islam.<sup>6</sup> In this instance it is clear that the village women are obliquely related to the Jumma and its sermons although their presence as part of the congregation is neither required nor permitted.

The village mosques have no regular communal prayers, rather they are used by individuals. Men offer their private prayers there within the various prayer periods of the day, and the women quietly and

---

<sup>5</sup> The Muslims from the village of Maduragoda are caught within this ideological distortion and do not apply for the government rice coupons to which they are entitled, "because the others wouldn't like it".

<sup>6</sup> Women were able she said, to procure ayurvedic abortifacients and subsequently miscarry. I did not establish this independently.



occasionally visit the shrines.<sup>7</sup> The practices associated with the village mosque however, also constitute an Islamic ritual community, but one which is constituted on different grounds and which celebrates a different facet of Islamic life. The ritual community of the village mosque is seen most clearly in the practice of the annual mosque feast (**kanduri**) held at each and every mosque in the area. This feast which is organized by village members is a ritual celebration of a Muslim community; a community made up of kin-groups, households, and individual men, women and children. It is not simply the egalitarian religious community of the Jumma mosque - the "brotherhood of Islam" that is celebrated here but the reproductive Islamic **families** who congregate around their village mosques.

The annual mosque feasts whilst celebrating village unity and identity, are not entirely exclusive and may draw much support from the wider area. It is common practice for the many young men of the village who often work and live elsewhere in the island, and the village men who have married elsewhere, to make all possible efforts to return to their natal village to celebrate the feast. This stress on returning to the village for the feast has also been observed in India (Saiyid, 1981; 135).<sup>8</sup> On these occasions the village may extend its links throughout the wider local Muslim community, thus signing both its distinct and cohesive village identity, and its participation in the wider egalitarian community of Islam. In the celebration of **village identity** Muslims fully recognize their internal differentiation as a principle of unity. It is primarily a celebration of a **diverse collective**; an assertion of a collective and local identity. Unity is unproblematic at this level, it is assumed. In the Jumma, by contrast, all men suffer a loss of identity and are rendered equal. The collectivity that is celebrated there is that of the **ummah**. Thus the Jumma is oriented to developing a **unity of diversity**. The village mosque by contrast, is fundamentally a collection of **households**, and as such implicitly recognizes that

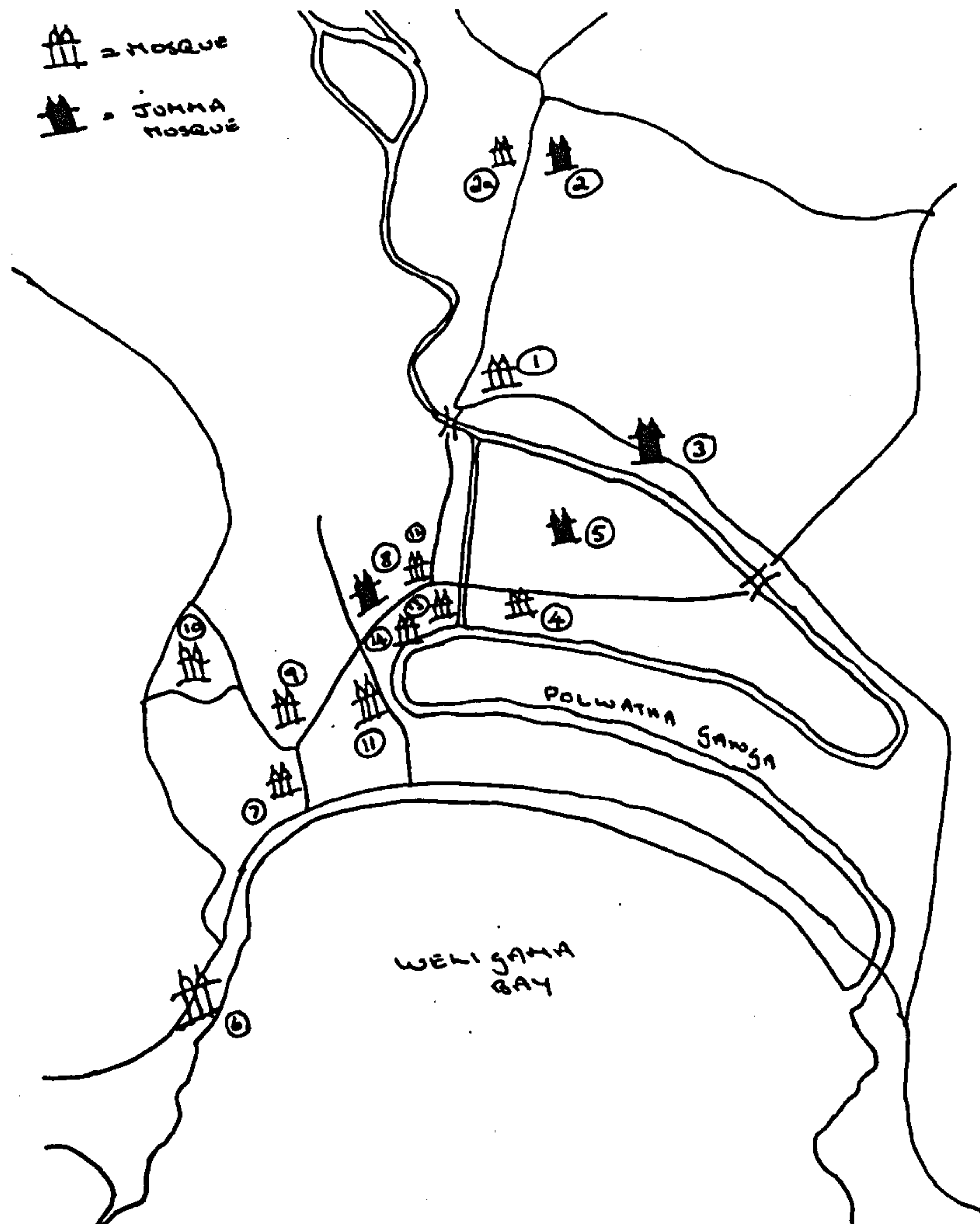
---

<sup>7</sup> Saiyed argues that as women are prevented from "participating fully in public prayers and worship (...there...) had to be a substitute for the mosque, and the dargah (shrine) is this 'functional alternative' (Saiyed, 1992:254 cites Smith, 1987:244) (brackets mine).

<sup>8</sup> Yalman states that "the Muslims always **"belong"** to some mosque or another" (ibid:285, my emphasis).

these are reproductive kin centres. The village mosque asserts a collective identity whereas the Jumma mosque subsumes individual identity in the egalitarian ummah. There appears to be a fundamental contradiction here between the assertion of a collective identity in the village mosque and the loss of individual identity in the Jumma mosque. However, as I shall argue in the following chapters the logic of Islamic ritual and calendrical practice essays a process of continual transcendence of the elements of social identity and actually **creates** individuality in its most autonomous form.

Figure 5.a : Location of Research Area Mosques.



In the research area (excluding Horagoda)<sup>9</sup> there are a total of thirteen mosques. (See Figure 5.a,; numbers in brackets refer to this

<sup>9</sup> The research area proper, is outlined in Appendix A.



figure.) Four of the thirteen mosques (2,3,5&8) are Jumma mosques. Four mosques are associated with the Arabic colleges where young men train as imams (11,12,13&14). These mosques are not considered to be village mosques though they can be and are used for private prayer by any men in the neighbourhood. The Jumma mosques are **both** village and Jumma mosques. With the exception of Wellipitiya (2 & 2a), almost all villages currently fall within the orbit of the centrally located Mohideen Grand Mosque(8). This mosque was built in 1814 and is located on the borders of two adjacent trading communities within the town area; Galbokka and New Street (formerly New Moor Street).

Visually the two communities run into one another and to the outsider are not at all easily distinguished. However there are two distinct village identities involved and this is reflected in the fact that this mosque has two imams who take turns to preach the sermon on alternate Fridays. Each community jealously guards its right to this significant opportunity to give voice to its particular ideological interests. This mosque also has two Trustees, one elected by each community. This Jumma mosque which serves as the central mosque for congregational prayers for the bulk of the areas' Muslims is also clearly the "village" mosque of two distinct communities.

This somewhat unusual situation is instructive for it highlights a number of points. Firstly, we realize that mosques have a complex significance and any single mosque may function at a number of levels. This mosque is the site of the largest local gathering in a Jumma prayer, catering to approximately 1500 males; the greatest expression of ritual egalitarian community within the area. It is located close to the central commercial district of the town and as all Muslim shops are closed for the duration of the Friday prayer, it draws all of the town's most powerful and most impoverished men to an egalitarian exercise of communal public worship. Yet, despite this, clearly the mosque is not solely about an undifferentiated community of Muslim males, for it also symbolically condenses the distinct identities of two Muslim villages within it. Secondly, it is clear that village identity is an important aspect of Islam in this context and this is actively maintained at a ritual level, through the annual mosque feasts. In the structure of the annual feast associated with this particular mosque the two communities maintain their distinct identities also, feasting on adjacent nights. This raises questions about the nature of Islamic egalitarian ideology and suggests that mosques are not simply "egalitarian"

spaces. Rather the engagement of the mosque in the practice of the ideology would seem to be simultaneously about identity and differentiation. Another way of looking at this would be to speak of two distinct types of identity here; identity as a member of an egalitarian group of Muslim males and identity as a member of a particular village. Gilsenan presents evidence of a similar distinction in Morocco between the Jumma and the local mosques. He contrasts the sacred space of the public mosque where

men form a congregation as Muslims that ideally dissolves the specifics of self, family and group into what is taken as the basic, fundamental identity of membership in the community of the faithful (1978:178)

with the small local mosques which are

vital signifiers of the identity of a particular community in a particular place (ibid, loc cit, my emphasis).

This contrasts with Weligama, where all the Jumma mosques condense both village and Jumma identity, thus reflecting perhaps that in this cultural context a greater ideological weight is accorded to the constitutive role of the village in the mosque. Within the research area two other more recent Jumma mosques have been established which bound off two very distinct villages (Figure 5.a, 3&5). The Jumma Mosques at Kapuwatta and Maduragoda were built in 1897 and 1942 respectively, and on each occasion split a village away from a larger Jumma mosque area. Prior to the building of their own Jumma mosque the men of Kapuwatta had attended Jumma prayers either at the Koledande (Palathaddi) Jumma mosque (destroyed in the 1915 riots) or at the central Jumma mosque in Galbokka/New Street whilst the men of Maduragoda had always attended the central Jumma mosque. With new Jumma mosques each of these communities establishes a new level of corporate identity and new relations with the former communities of the central Jumma mosque.

Mosques, therefore, have a complex significance within this Islamic community, being both symbols of and for the community. As village mosques and Jumma mosques they are the sites and centres of two distinct types of ritual community to which Muslims belong, and thus they serve to define both actual village communities and the wider ideological communities of Muslims. In the discussion below I will draw out the varied meanings and contexts for Islamic mosque centred rituals and explore their meaning for, and connection with, the domestic order.



## 5.2 The Form of the Mosque.

The mosque is used for prayer by the men in the community and all the mosques follow a standard form. In ideological terms the mosques here seem broadly equivalent to those of Muslim communities elsewhere in the world (Gilsenan, 1982, Gerholm, *ibid*). The terms used to describe the parts of the mosque are Arabic, although the building itself is most often colloquially referred to with the Tamil word - **palli**. The mosques are often resplendent with minarets and cupolas in line with ideas of Islamic architecture but in most cases this takes the form of an elaborate ornamental facade with a much simpler building behind. The building itself is most often open, light, spacious, cool and inviting, and contains a central room whose ground is **haram** - sacred and forbidden for non-Muslims and women (in this instance) to stand upon.<sup>10</sup> The **haram** is therefore a sacred space, but in the sense of forbidden or restricted. It shares an equivalence in logical structure with all other Muslim mosques, and Mecca in particular, to which it is oriented. It is distinct from the sacred space of the adjacent saint's tomb, but together they serve to orient the mosque to both Mecca and Heaven.<sup>11</sup>

Men will only enter the mosque when they have completed their ritual ablutions (**wudu**) and are in a state of purity, and women never enter this part of the mosque.<sup>12</sup> Within the central **haram** there is a

---

<sup>10</sup> When a former prominent Sinhalese politician could not be politely deterred from entering this **haram** area in one of the local mosques, the floor had to be washed with water to purify it, before it could be used for further prayers. This reflects the exclusivist dimension in Islam yet again. The same logic is applied to the public space within a household, before any **rathib** or **khattam** (funeral prayers and feast 40 days after burial) are held there. It is also applied to the house as a whole before the month of Ramazan.

<sup>11</sup> The Ka'bah itself stands immediately beneath its heavenly replica and is circumambulated continually by angels. Thus the mosque is oriented towards Heaven through Mecca, and also has a window to Heaven by virtue of the entombed saint.

<sup>12</sup> The Colombo Borah community contrasts strongly with this practice. They have collapsed the five-times prayers into four (by combining two of them) and on all occasions women perform their prayers in rows behind the men in the mosque. The women of this commodity-trading, urban community are far more visible than the women of the majority Sunni community, and they have the freedom of the streets. The most orthodox among them wear a long dress coupled with a short cloak (often in a matching fabric) that covers their head and the upper half of their body but which exposes their face and hands. The Borahs are also reported to practice a more severe form of female circumcision - thus signing femininity much more

**mihrab** and a **minbar**. The **mihrab** is a small semi-circular concave niche, the height of a man, which has been built into the structure of the wall and which indicates the direction of Mecca - the **qiblah**. A spiritual doorway of sorts, it signs the orientation of all prayers offered in the mosque. The **minbar** is a pulpit at the top of a small flight of steps which faces the crowd assembled in the interior of the mosque and it is used by the imam for preaching purposes. The remainder of the area inside the mosque building is the subject of no particular ritual proscription, and traditionally Muslim travellers may seek refuge in any mosque and sleep there. This occurs locally from time to time but is far more common in some of the Colombo mosques.<sup>13</sup> In some cases the imam lives in a room in the mosque.<sup>14</sup> The outer area of the mosque will contain at least one **hawl** - a cement pool about a metre deep and filled with water. This is surrounded by shallow guttering and it is here than men perform their ablutions before prayer. Often there are a few fish swimming in the **hawl** which in local opinion confirms that the water is pure and fresh.<sup>15</sup> Islam has no icons and the only permitted form of decoration

---

strongly in a physical sense, and concurrently permitting women a far greater degree of social freedom. Among the Sunni community, the new mosque at Maligawatte in Colombo (a shanty area and traditional area of Muslim settlement), has a circular upstairs gallery for women, with a separate entrance. Here women may also offer their prayers in the mosque and avoid contact with men. Forbes (1983:69,ff72) states that in the Maldives there are **namad-ge** (prayer houses) which are used exclusively by women. Within the research area during Ramazan there is a **Tharavih** House. (Tharavih is a particular Ramazan prayer), set aside for women on the New Street housing estate. This allows women to offer their Tharavih prayers communally. Another house in the grounds of the Baari mosque is used once annually for a women's feast, attended by the kinswomen of the founder of the mosque (See also fn 37).

<sup>13</sup> The Grand Mosque in Second Cross Street, Colombo, in the heart of the textile area within the Pettah (the commercial area par excellence), is constantly host to a huge variety of Muslims from elsewhere in the island. These Muslims are in the city on business or some personal errand. The village by contrast, has generally drawn visitors who have come to see friends or relatives, and who therefore, reside with them. The occasional stranger passes through on a longer business trip or a pilgrimage.

<sup>14</sup> There is an expectation that all Muslim males will marry and invariably the imam will move to his wife's house. A visiting imam or saint may well reside in the mosque however.

<sup>15</sup> Many of the household wells from which people draw water to bathe or drink, are also stocked with a few fish for this purpose. The understanding is that fish eat impurities. This is arguably a local interpretation of the **running**, and therefore fresh and pure



is the word of God, which has itself become iconic. Sri Lankan mosques are designed in accordance with this prescription but they are not elaborately tiled or intricately adorned with the words of the scriptures. Most of the mosques in the research area are very plain with a sparse and cool aesthetic in common with that aspired to in the houses themselves.<sup>16</sup> The vast majority of mosques are painted white or green and white, but there are also blue mosques to be found.<sup>17</sup>

The mosques are used constantly by the men of the community for daily prayers, during the five prayer periods which make up the twenty-four hour day.<sup>18</sup> Prayers do not necessarily have to be offered in a mosque, any clean space will suffice and indeed all women offer all their prayers within the home, but there is a greater value attached to prayers offered within a mosque. The major point of social and religious differentiation between women and men is most radically

---

water, that is used in the Middle East for ablutions (Glassé, 1989:422). When performing ablutions, the water is always poured from a container if a tap is not used.

<sup>16</sup> It is the modern houses of the middle class that most closely approximate this ideal; being both light and airy. They often have the name of Allah incorporated decoratively into the cement frieze blocks that stand above the doors to provide added ventilation. The older and poorer houses are generally darker with smaller windows and high pitched rooves, achieving coolness through lack of light.

<sup>17</sup> The Sinhalese sometimes say that the blue colour is associated with Vishnu whose colour is blue. However, the question of any possible Hindu association on this point is firmly laid to rest by the total aesthetic contrast between the mosque, which ideally should be light and airy, and the Hindu temple which is dark and heavy, as befits a hollow mountain. The Omar Mihular Mosque was the site of a major congregational dispute in 1965 when one group painted the mosque blue, without authorization.

<sup>18</sup> The five prayer periods are **Subah** (Sunrise), **Luhar** (mid-day), **Asar** (mid-afternoon), **Maghrib** (Sunset), and **Isha** (evening). The **azan** announces the beginning of each new prayer period and Muslims are required to offer the appropriate prayers before the next period begins. The prayer periods are determined in relation to the movement of the Sun, as the calendar is similarly determined in relation to the Moon. Observance of the five times prayers varies enormously, with some people observing them all and others almost none. The **Jumma** prayer however is **always** well-attended. Women to my knowledge, are more likely to observe the daily prayers, but there are no hard and fast rules as to class or sex determining religious observance. Some of the most Westernized women certainly miss them, but on the other hand I also came across some younger women in the most religious of households, who were steadfastly dis-interested in prayers and attracted no opprobrium.

reflected in the fact that women have no access to the mosque or to the egalitarian community of believers. The fact that their prayers are always of less value, helps to render them always, less-Islamic.<sup>19</sup> This continually re-enforces their greater distance from orthodox Islam in this cultural context, where they are always perceived as the indigenous wives of the descendants of Arab traders.

### 5.3 Mosque Organisation.

The overall control of the mosques rests in the hands of the mosque Trustees. The number of trustees in any mosque may vary but an odd number is the most common. These men are nominated or elected by the mosque community and the appointments are confirmed by the Commission of Mosques and Charitable Trusts or Waqfs Board, as three year appointments. The three year term is a purely bureaucratic device imposed on top of community notions of trustee or guardianship which have a much longer life in many cases.<sup>20</sup> Formerly, the trustees were often from the families of those who had built the mosque in the first place and they maintained an unofficial but widely accepted right to the trusteeship. This situation is altering but is by no means complete, and the hands of those men associated with building the mosques can still be observed not far from the reins of power. In the case of one very wealthy benefactor the position of trustee in three local mosques is held by his brother-in-law and it is widely, but quietly stated, that the original man maintains control through his sister. Two of these mosques are small ones associated with Arabic colleges and although equivalent in terms of "sacred spaces" they are not village mosques, located at the heart of village structures of significance. They do not therefore condense within themselves any village identity. Thus they are not nearly so important in terms of prestige and control. When discussing village identity I argue that the practices associated with the mosque, in particular the mosque feast, consolidate the identities of the various households which surround the mosque in geographical space, and the multiple kinship webs that emanate from these households and

---

<sup>19</sup> The aesthetics of female worship stand in sharp contrast to those of male worship. While the men worship both **communally** and **publicly**, prayer for women is on the whole, a **solitary** and **private** affair carried out in the home.

<sup>20</sup> There were two men who acted as trustees at the Kaparatota and Maduragoda mosques for sixteen and thirty-six years respectively .



tie them together, into a cohesive and unique identity. Kinship webs are a fundamental dimension of village 'structures of significance' and influence both political loyalties and business relationships. In this context it would not be likely for a man to be Trustee of three village mosques. In a second case, the current effective "trustee-ship" is held by the son of the family who built the mosque. A committee of three trustees, confirmed by the Waqfs Board does not function but leaves the control to him.<sup>21</sup> At one level this is simply a continuation of the culturally accepted method of mosque administration whilst tacitly acknowledging the overall control of the Waqfs Board. The contradictions between the traditional situation and the more recent, politically egalitarian structure of the Waqfs 'elected' trustees are well recognized by the communities. This particular case however provokes great anger amongst the young men of that community. This anger, which is not often openly expressed, due to fear (of their elders) they say, is a reflection of the shifting ideological arena which surrounds mosque control.<sup>22</sup> These young men who have yet to carve their niche in the economic field are objecting to forms of domination (in this case symbolic) which exclude them from access to power. A Trustee is generally someone who is considered both powerful and respected within the community and most are merchants in the 40 - 60 year age group. (Table 5.b). In the past trustees were generally those men who had endowed the mosques in the first instance or male members of their extended families. The other category was composed of those men who had not necessarily made their fortunes as merchants but rather had extremely religious backgrounds. However these men were fewer in number and tended to be concentrated in the trustee positions associated with the college mosques.

---

<sup>21</sup> The Mosque was handed over to the Waqfs Board in 1958. Since that time they have appointed the son to the Trusteeship every three years. The other two trustees are his brother and 'cousin-brother' - cross-cousin.

<sup>22</sup> They had attempted to "issue a notice" against the family control of this mosque but finally gave up "due to their inexperience and fear".

Table 5.b:

Occupation of Mosque Trustees in Weligama 1985 (12 mosques)	
Occupation	Number
Merchant	15
Gem Merchant	6 <sup>23</sup>
Other*	4
Total	33 <sup>24</sup>

Trustee-ship formerly signified both wealth and religious commitment and a particular cultural idea that if one was wealthy, dominant, and prepared to endow a mosque - then one was ipso facto - blessed and legitimately dominant.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> An actual total of four men here, as one man in this category is the sole trustee in three mosques (cf above). "Other"\* includes one District Development Council member, one Muslim school principal, one labourer and one technical officer. Of the 31 actual trustees, five are Hadjiars (those who have completed the pilgrimage) and two are Moulanas.

<sup>24</sup> A total of 31 men see ff above.

<sup>25</sup> I refer here to cultural understandings of the wealthy and dominant which for most people in the island have been formed within the understandings of encompassment found in hierarchical societies (Kapferer, 1983, 1988). I have used throughout the thesis a concept of incorporation rather than encompassment when referring to Muslims, as this more accurately describes the situation in egalitarian societies. Following Dumont (ibid) I perceive individuals in egalitarian societies to constitute the society rather than being constituted through society. However the Sri Lankan Muslim society, despite its internal egalitarian ideology, exists amidst an avowedly hierarchical society. This gives rise to a constant tension within the community, where there are elements of transformed ideologies and shared understandings. (Without further extensive research the areas of ideological overlap are impossible to determine with any accuracy). Certainly Muslims in a dominant position within the social hierarchy were held in high regard by their Sinhalese neighbours. In particular, on the occasion of Sinhalese New Year, Muslims report giving gifts of money to Sinhalese villagers. In Sinhalese understandings it is highly auspicious to receive gifts of money from those located well above you in the hierarchy; it augurs well for your own financial well-being in the coming year. In these instances both Sinhalese and Muslims are behaving according to the logic of the hierarchical system.



After the introduction of Waqfs control and the formal election of trustees, to continue with what was increasingly perceived as dynastic control rather than a form of spiritual succession was interpreted by the young men in the case above, as "undemocratic" and as excluding them from access to power. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that these men were disputing the Trusteeship of a small village mosque in Galbokka and the adjacent New Street community, had elected as their Trustee to the Grand Mosque, a 25 year old technical officer. The young mens' perception of the situation as "un-democratic" however, was not shared by everybody, and there was another interpretation of the situation. This particular mosque had been built by a local man as the result of a dream by his wife. The dream featured the Battle of Badr which is now remembered in the annual feast celebrated at this mosque. All dreams are of great significance to many in the community and their inner meanings regularly explored for clues to the future. Religious dreams are interpreted as minor miracles, as the intrusion of a religious truth into the phenomenal world. As I discussed in chapter Four, many of the island's Muslim saints revealed their identities through individual's dreams. For most of the older Muslims in this area the fact that her son remains "sole" trustee in effect, is interpreted in terms of a spiritual succession in which the son

---

Internal to the Muslim community however, when considering the logic of the egalitarian system, it is the concept of incorporation which should properly guide the discussion. Within this ideological system (in practice), prestige and sanctity go hand in hand. The gift of a mosque is arguably a form of accumulation of "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1987). We must also consider the idea of *zakat* - a religious gift of alms which blesses the remaining portion. Having sufficient wealth initially, to endow a mosque, suggests to the community that "Allah is pleased" with the individual, and this commands a certain degree of respect on religious grounds. Nonetheless class friction introduces tensions into the relation and many resent both the economic, and religious dominance of the wealthy. (See Thawfeeq, *ibid*) for trenchant criticisms of Muslim "big-men". I suggest that there is also here an element of hierarchical understanding in which, the accumulation of symbolic capital and distribution of wealth by the wealthy is understood as an attempt at encompassment. The wealthy are in a position to stamp their individual identity on the community, and this will always give rise to resistance. A resistance which is expressed in egalitarian terms. Perhaps the whole argument can be interpreted in these terms, simply gaining its force from the ideology of egalitarianism, but the hierarchical possibility should not be ignored. The question awaits further research.

continues to discharge his mother's religious vow.<sup>26</sup> This practice is therefore accepted as legitimate, Waqfs Commission and the introduction of new forms of legitimation aside.

The island-wide control of all Mosques and Shrines by the Waqfs Board is comparatively recent although the idea of Waqfs in the island would undoubtedly have arrived with the religion itself. In 1956 the government passed *The Muslim Mosques and Charitable Trusts or Wakfs Act, No 51* which established state control over the island's mosques, and itself appointed the Commissioner of Waqfs and Charitable Trusts. These political appointments (as all appointments in Sri Lanka are) have undoubtedly contributed to an extension of a traditionally held South-western dominance and control of the island's Muslim community through their overall alignment with the ruling U.N.P. The Waqfs Board collects 2% of all takings from Mosques and 10% from the Shrines in the island. The Shrines are by far the most lucrative category and generate most of the funds which are then used in a charitable manner to assist in the upkeep of mosques in the poorer areas.<sup>27</sup>

The mosques are administered on a day-to-day basis by an *imam*. This is a full-time "holding" and in many cases the incumbent is from another village and has moved to take up the post. An imam is a man who has completed a lengthy period of training in an Arabic College, (generally seven years) and has the qualification and title of a religious scholar; *alim* (plural *ulema*). Locally however they are more often referred to as *moulavi*.<sup>28</sup> A few are married with families

---

<sup>26</sup> Apart from the son's obligation to continue to fulfil a vow taken by his Mother this also reflects a particular cultural understanding of the Mother-son kinship-tie. When engaged in the practice of numerology a man will use his mother's name as the basis of this interpretative exercise. This indicates a definite connection between the Mother and the son's inner being. The Father's name confers a clear social identity and in line with Muslims in the Middle East the first three initials of an individual's name (male or female) are the initials of the immediate patrilineal ascendants (FFF, FF, F, Ego).

<sup>27</sup> The most popular (and therefore most lucrative) shrines nationally, are those in Gampola near Kandy, and the shrine at Dewatagaha Mosque in Colombo. Both are widely patronized by members of all religious communities.

<sup>28</sup> The term *khatib* (katheeb - preacher) is used in some cases instead of imam, although they perform the functions of both prayer leader and preacher. The term *lebbe* is also used occasionally but it



but the majority are young and single. Another mosque functionary is the **muazzin** who performs the call to prayer. This is a minor post, meagrely rewarded financially and held as a part-time position. In some cases the recipient supplements his income by the sacrificial killing of goats and bulls for households who wish to make particular sacrifices and are holding a feast. In other cases the call to prayer is an honorary task, undertaken and shared by a number of men of the community.

#### 5.4 The Tariqas.

A tariqa is a "way" or chosen "path" to God and is followed with more or less commitment according to individual choice. The majority of men in the area belong to either the **Shasuliah** or **Qaddirriya** tariqa and several of the mosques are identified as belonging to both of these tariqas (Table 5.c). There is thus no division drawn in the community between men who belong to either of these tariqas, and membership of any particular tariqa is no bar to mosque use. Only in the case of Kapuwatta where the mosque and village are identified with the **Rifai (Riffai'iyya)** tariqa, is there any visible distinction at all. The Rifai tariqa however is an offshoot of the Qaddirriya tariqa.<sup>29</sup> The only other tariqas mentioned were the **Naqshabandia** tariqa with a few members in Galle, and the **Allawiyia**.<sup>30</sup> Tariqa

---

has two definite meanings in this context. It refers both to a man who performs religious activities, and is also used as an honorific. It is possible that as honorifics they refer to the point of origin of the individual concerned. **Marrikar** (an honorific used in Kapuwatta), refers to those from the central highlands and **Lebbe** to those from the Eastern Province (See McGilvray, 1973:47). Mahroof states that the term "lebbe" is "generally employed in Sri Lanka to denote those whose knowledge of Islamic practice is derived from their ascendants while those who have formally studied in madrasahs are called **alims** or **moulavis** (Mahroof, 1990b:98, ff44). All of the imams in this area were graduates of Arabic colleges and commonly called **moulavi**. Women also may undertake the training required to become a **Moulavia** at a college in Alutgama on the South-west coast. These women may then take posts as teachers in Muslim colleges for women but there is no opportunity for communal prayer leading. There were two young women with these qualifications in Kapuwatta.

<sup>29</sup> Aziz states that the Rifai are a heterodox offshoot of the Junaydi order (1969:36-7) in contrast to informants' beliefs.

<sup>30</sup> The spiritual leader of one other tariqa, the **Hakkia** tariqa, lives in the area but his followers are mostly located in Tamil Nadu. The tariqa was started by his father who came to India and Sri Lanka from Iraq and is now enshrined as a saint near Madras. (He was thus in the position of "orthodox outsider".) The name of the tariqa

membership is not exclusive and indeed it is possible to belong to several at one and the same time (see also Gilsenan, 1973:66). This appeared to be more common twenty and thirty years ago than it is today.

Table 5.c.

Tariqa Affiliation of Weligama Mosques					
No.	Mosque Name	Type	Tariqa	Usage	
1	Koledande Mohideen	Village	Shasuliah/Qaddirriya	200	+
2	Wellipitiya	Jumma	Qaddirriya	50	+
3	Kapuwatta Mohideen	Jumma	Qaddirriya/Rifai'yya	100	+
4	Denypitiya	Village	Shasuliah/Qaddirriya	100	+
5	Masjithul Falah	Jumma	Shasuliah/Qaddirriya	250	+
6	Kaparatota	Village	-	10	-
7	Meera Shabib	Village	(some Tabliq members)	100	+
8	Mohideen Grand Mosque	Jumma	Qaddirriya	900	-
9	Omar Mihular	Village	-	75	+
10	Masjithul Bathriyya	Village	Qaddirriya	100	+
11	Masjithul Baari	College	-	100	-
12	Mursiyyia	College/ Zawia	Shasuliah	150	+
13	Al Madrasathul Khilurriyyia	College/ Takia	-	150	+
14	Al Madrasathul Aroosiyyia	College	Qaddirriya	150	+
TOTAL USERS <sup>31</sup>				2435	

refers to "the inner way" and thus shares a philosophical position with many of the other forms of Sufism. But they also believe that all religions are the same and the Qur'an is an entirely metaphorical text. Thus for the Hakkia, Heaven and Hell are facets of this life and not the rewards or punishments of the next.



Membership in a tariqa is formally obtained by swearing an oath before the **kalifa** (khalifah, a spiritual successor) of the order, but in practice most of the younger men simply identify themselves as belonging to the tariqa of their father and have not formally taken an oath at all. Tariqa membership or affiliation, stresses an identity traced through males, in contrast to village mosque identity which is always linked to female (mother or wife's) residence. There are no resident kalifas of either the Shasuliah or Qaddiriyya tariqas within the town and these tariqas do not in any concrete organizational sense function co-operatively as 'brotherhoods'. The Shasuliah tariqa in Colombo (Dehiwela) arranges meetings every two months where members may meet and extend their business relationships. These meetings function along the lines of a religious 'chamber of commerce' where economic enterprise may be pursued with partners who share a common religious orientation thus providing an elementary guarantee of character. As Cohen states "religion provides an ideal blue-print for the development of an informal political organization" (1969:210). There is no such public face for these tariqas in the town, rather the tariqa members are incorporated within a structure which for the most part has no organizational significance, tariqa membership is simply assumed. It is one aspect of Muslim male identity.

I met a few informants who stated that they did not belong to a tariqa, but only one who argued strongly against the existence of tariqas in Islam altogether, saying "Muslims are Muslims, and that's it, pure and simple!" This exponent of the puritan Wahhabi line has not had much success and many other men stated that everyone in Weligama believes in tariqas and that is why "the Wahhabi's can't get in!"<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> The figures for usage in each case are not based on survey data but are estimates sought from the imams or Mosque Trustees. When compared with Census figures they appear too low, but this is no doubt due to the large numbers of Muslim males who reside in the research area, but who work, and therefore pray, elsewhere on the island. The presence of a + sign in the final column of the Table indicates whether or not there is a Qur'an Madrasa attached to the mosque.

<sup>32</sup> The Wahhabi's are a Saudi Arabian sect, with a strictly fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, who during the nineteenth century gained a considerable following in North India. Their practice "denies all esoterism or mysticism, and rejects the idea of Saints, including the visiting of Saint's tombs..." (Glassé, *ibid*:416). Their beliefs are centred on the principle of **tawhid** - the

The Rifai tariqa in Kapuwatta stands in marked contrast to the situation above. Most of the villagers state that they are members of the Rifai tariqa, and the majority of the young men of the village spend some time actively engaged in tariqa activities. The Rifai tariqa arrived far more recently in the area and through the Rifai Tariqa Association (R.T.A.) has a definite organisational structure and strong village membership. There are two resident kalifas in the village. The spiritual head of the order lives in Androth Island in the Laccadive Islands and visits on the occasion of the annual feast. The members of the Association regularly perform the Rifai Rathib at households throughout the Galle and Weligama areas.<sup>33</sup>

---

assertion of Divine Oneness. In their interpretation, the notion of **baraka** suggests polytheism. They further reject any understanding of sacredness applied to particular places. Following the ideas behind shrine practice outlined in Chapter Four it is not surprising that they have had little success here.

<sup>33</sup> The rathib is of a similar structure to the zhikr, (dhikr) that is found elsewhere in the Islamic world (Gilsenan, *ibid*, Crapanzano, 1973) and is understood as a lengthy recital of praises of God and repetition of his 1000 names; essentially a meditative process which allows the performer to more directly experience faith. Each tariqa has its own rathib and many of them incorporate a particular pattern of physical movements and rates of breathing, in association with the repeated prayers. The experience of trance or higher levels of consciousness is implicit within the practice. In the research area the Halara rathib of the Shasuliah tariqa and the Haddath rathib of the Qaddirriya are regularly performed. What is distinctive about the Rifai rathib is that it requires the use of rabans and may often be accompanied by "amazing acts of faith in spiritual ecstasy by the mureeds" (Koya Thangal, p.c). This "self-mutilation" often involves quite spectacular feats of apparently painless yet severe attacks on the body with knives, swords, skewers and spikes. The great power of the ritual is held to derive from its display of the victory of faith over pain. All rathibs are regularly performed in the community and all these performances are understood to have the value of prayer. It is only the Rifai rathib when accompanied by "these acts of spiritual ecstasy" which if witnessed in full, will actually strengthen the faith of the observer rather than simply the performer (Thawfeeq; *ibid*). One popular household venue for the Rifai Rathib recitals by members of the (R.T.A.), is at 'circumcision households'. The performance of the Rathib on these often large and elaborate occasions stresses the religious significance of these events. However the ideas of transcending pain through spiritually induced trance make the Rifai Rathib a particularly apt choice for circumcisions as far as some people are concerned.



## 5.5 Religious Education.

Another important facility associated with the mosques is the Qur'an **madrasa** (Koran school) for all Muslim children in the area.<sup>34</sup> In the **madrasas** small children learn to recite the Qur'an from its Arabic script.<sup>35</sup> There is no attempt here to teach the children to read and comprehend Arabic itself; the ability to recite is all that is required. Newly washed and scrubbed, with covered heads and carrying small painted wooden slates, children heading off to the **madrasa** are a common sight in all the Muslim areas. The fact that each village mosque has a **Madrasa** associated with it underscores the fact that the religious instruction of children is the responsibility of the village community. Al **Madrasathul Aroosiyyia** is a full-time Qur'an school running classes from 8.00-11.30 and 2-4.30 each day. Instruction in a Qur'an **Madrasa** is a child's introduction to communal religious life. Both male and female children attend up until the age of puberty. After this the young girls remain at home and the boys shift all of their religious activity to the mosque.

Part of Weligama's claim to orthodoxy rests in the fact that it contains a number of Arabic colleges and trains young boys from all over the island as imams. There are three residential colleges of this type in the town with students aged between 13 and 23 years of age. **Mursiyyia** belongs to the **Shasuliah** *tariqa* and is called a **zawia** (Sufi lodge), Al **Madrasathul Khilurriyyia** is called a **takia**, (from **Takya** - a pillow; a resting place of **Faqirs** (Herklots, *ibid*:371)).<sup>36</sup> The third, **Baari College**, belongs to the **Qaddirriya Ahrouhissia** and

---

<sup>34</sup> In the research area these schools were always referred to by the Arabic term - **madrasa**, but the Tamil **palli-koodam** (mosque school) is used elsewhere (Thawfeeq, *ibid*:18).

<sup>35</sup> The Grand Mohideen or central Jumma Mosque in the town has no Qur'an **Madrasa** attached to it. There are however three Arabic colleges with **Madrasas** in the nearby area, all of which hold Qur'an classes for the local children. There are also a couple of classes, run by women in their homes, for very small groups of children in the immediate neighbourhood.

<sup>36</sup> The close links between these schools and the *tariqas*, or mystical brotherhoods is also noted in Java, where the **pesantren** "is both a theological school and a center of mystical learning and practice" (Woodward, 1988:60).

was started over one hundred years ago by Mapilla beh Alim Ahrous, a missionary from South India.<sup>37</sup>

In each of these institutions the boys undergo a rigorous, seven-year period of training, which combines both secular and religious schooling. The life is very simple and intense. They live for the entire time in the college building, which generally has a room for them to sleep in, one for the imam, and the haram space of the mosque itself which they use regularly for prayer. These Islamic institutions represent the pinnacle of Islamic purity - as all-male religious environments. The students at the Shasuliah zawia perform a Halara rathib each Monday night which is attended by some of the village men from time to time. A group of students from one or other of the colleges will often be invited to households in the town to recite a mowlood and partake of a feast on an occasion of importance which a family wishes to celebrate. The students' dress of long white sarong, knee-length white shirt and a white cloth thrown over their shoulder is very distinctive and they are immediately recognizable around the town. The distinctive caps which they wear identify the particular institution they are associated with. The students shave their heads regularly, an act which stresses their religious purity.<sup>38</sup> When their training is complete, the students graduate in a "turban tying" ceremony. On this occasion they ritually deliver their first sermon in the mosque.<sup>39</sup> Not all of these young men will take up

---

<sup>37</sup> **Mappilla** would suggest that he originated from Kerala (Dale, 1980). He travelled all over Sri Lanka and started more than fifty mosques in his life-time. He is entombed in a small room next to the college mosque.

<sup>38</sup> The spiritual leader of the Rifai tariqa is regarded as particularly blessed because he has always been "naturally bald" - a circumstance regarded by most as a minor miracle. Body hair is regarded as polluting in some cases. In the case of a new Muslim baby, the head is shaved seven or nine days after birth to remove hair polluted by its contact with the mother's birth canal. Some women in the area also regularly shave their bodies to remove their body hair (see also Boddy:1982).

<sup>39</sup> Metcalf (1984:7) speaks of turbans as signs of spiritual perfection and succession. I witnessed a "turban-tying" ritual which was attended by many men from the research area and the **ulema**, both local and from Galle. As is customary on such occasions the **ulema** approached the mosque on foot, at the head of a large crowd of men. The two young men who were graduating on this occasion, first took part in a **Halara** rathib. This rathib, of the Shasuliah tariqa is performed in a circle, the perfect egalitarian form. After the rathib they became **qutb**, defined as the "centre which contains the periphery, or is present in it, (...) a primordial spiritual symbol.



permanent employment as an imam in a mosque. There are many moulavis who are engaged in business. Interestingly, both these long periods of religious study and active tariqa involvement are primarily the province of the younger unmarried men. This could be a point of contrast with other ethnographic material (Crapanzano, ibid, Gilsenan, ibid, Evans-Pritchard, 1949, Gellner, 1969) where the implicit assumption is that men of all ages are involved.

The Table below (5.d.) indicates the natal villages of the religious students within the town. What is significant in the table is the island wide distribution of students. There are other colleges in Galle, Colombo, Kandy and the North Central Province, plus one for women in Alutgama.

**Table 5.d :**  
Villages of Origin of students training in two Arabic Colleges in Weligama in 1985. (Total 33 students)

Village of Origin	Province	Al Madrasathul Khiluriyya	Mursiyyia Arabic College
Narammala	N.C.P.	3	-
Batticaloa	E.P	1	1
Hemmatagama	C.P.	3	-
Colombo	W.P.	3	1
Matale	C.P.	1	1
Mawella	S.P.	-	5
Panapitiya	W.P.	-	3
Anuradhapura	N.C.P.	-	5
Kandy	C.P.	-	1
Nawalapitiya	C.P.	-	1
Kurenagala	N.C.P.	-	1
Trincomalee	E.P.	-	1
Weligama	S.P.	-	2
TOTAL		11	22

---

The idea of the *qutb* is the recognition that the function of "spiritual centre" can reside in a human being. The *qutb* is at the same time a celestial reality, and when actualized as the delegation of authority upon earth, it implies a sanctity of the highest order" (Glassé, ibid:327).

Whether the students are despatched here by their parents rather than to those colleges located closer to their homes may be on account of the symbolic value of colleges located in these orthodox centres of the South or alternatively due to family connections here. This I was not able to determine.

### 5.6 Variation in Mosque Organisation.

The fact that young men, from all over the island are being trained here as imams to work in mosques could lead one to assume that all the mosques throughout the island are similar in orientation. At a broad doctrinal level most of them are, the greatest majority being Sunni's of the Shafi school, but there is a strong degree of variation in mosque organisation throughout the island and I note particularly the differences between the East coast, Kandy and the South West coast. In the Kandyan area where Muslims and Sinhalese share an identical formal kinship structure (Yalman, ibid:300), Muslim villages may be distinguished from those of Kandyan Sinhalese by the existence of a **Palliya Jamaat** (Mosque Council). This is a body of elected representatives (Marikkars) headed by a Matticham or leader. The Jamaat elects various office holders and appoints the religious functionaries, the Muaddin (Muazzin) and the Lebbe (ibid:284). This council also takes responsibility for "all the public affairs of the laity" (ibid, op cit); and thus they act as marriage registrars and courts of law. Non-attendance at the Friday prayer in Yalman's time (1954-56) was punished by a fine of one rupee. The overall situation was structured

so that the boundaries of a group with a mosque and the limits of the judicial powers of the mosque council are co-terminous. (...) all disputes are heard first by these councils, and only when the councils fail to make a settlement - which is apparently rare - are they taken to regular law courts (ibid;285).

Thus in Kandy, the mosque Council was a body of elected representatives which had a very penetrating degree of community control.<sup>40</sup>

This differs markedly from the situation on the East Coast where the Mosque Councils are made up of the male heads of the named

---

<sup>40</sup> This situation was confirmed to be still operative in 1984 (Jones, p.c.).



matrilineal clans or **kudis** (McGilvray, 1973; 9). A kudi is a unilineal descent unit and this social structure is shared by both Tamil Hindu and Muslim East Coast communities although the ideologically correct number of kudi s varies, with eighteen for the Hindu communities and seven for the Muslims.<sup>41</sup> In both communities the kudis are the basis of mosque and temple organization (ibid, op cit). On the South West coast the situation is again radically different. There are no matrilineages as on the East Coast and there is no body of elected representatives which constitutes the Palliya Jamaat as in the Kandyan area. Here it is the male electorate at large which is understood as the **jamaath** (jamaat) and there is no functioning Mosque Council beyond this. All the mosques are controlled by individually elected trustees. Often the trustees are appointed to distinct offices on a committee which governs the mosque; those of President, Secretary or Treasurer but they remain first and foremost trustees of equivalent status. They may acquire a certain status through the position of Trustee but Mosque Trustees have no authority beyond the Mosque itself. The post of Qazi or Registrar of Muslim Marriages is also held by an individual and the attached duties are not the responsibility of the Palliya Jamaat. There is no Qazi court in the town for those wishing to divorce.<sup>42</sup>

The radical variation that is found in mosque organisation begs some further comment.<sup>43</sup> There seems to be a far greater stress on individualism on the South-West coast where originally Arab traders married local Sinhalese and Tamil women and lived matrilocally with a patrilineal rule of descent. The Low country was subject to much earlier colonial penetration and control than the Kandyan kingdom and it appears certain that these were the earliest areas of Muslim settlements. In the Kandy area conversion to Islam seems to have involved both Indian Muslims and early Middle Eastern traders. On the

---

<sup>41</sup> The number seven here clearly refers back to the original myth of the arrival of seven Muslims from India (Yalman, ibid:282-3).

<sup>42</sup> I assume the nearest Qazi court is in Galle or Matara although I did not visit it. There was a local Registrar of Marriages in Kapuwatta. I observed the practice at the Qazi Court in Colombo and it was explained to me that every effort was made initially to mediate between the husband and wife in dispute and to only agree to a divorce after three such attempts had failed.

<sup>43</sup> It is also an area that richly deserves further investigation. It lies however, outside the scope of this thesis which deals primarily with a South coast community.

East coast Indian Muslims married into a Hindu Tamil community which was both matrilineal and matrilocal. Islam in the South Asian region has been historically, a religion of conversion and as foreign Muslim men married into the indigenous communities so Islam has been shaped by local kinship ideologies and practices. Muslim society of the South-west coast is highly differentiated and individualist, the Kandyan Muslims are essentially bi-lateral and the East Coast Muslims are for the most part matrilocal and matrilineal. The marriages of Muslim males (Indian and Middle-Eastern) into communities with three very different kinship structures produced Muslim communities with three very distinct patterns of organisation. These structural differences are reflected in the different patterns of mosque organisation.

The property rights and marriage rules are distinct in each of these three areas yet in every case residence is matrilocal. Universal matrilocal residence, across the island, renders them a very distinct community. It marks them as distinct from most Hindu Tamils (not those of the East Coast), and from Sinhalese preference.<sup>44</sup> It is the widespread nature of the Muslims' distinctive residence practices which indicates most clearly their "Muslim" influence on the local kinship structures. This distinctive and universal residence practice which makes them distinctive as a religious group within the island paradoxically however, renders them radically distinct from those Muslims of the Middle East whose post-marital residence is virilocal.<sup>45</sup>

To return to the variation in mosque organisation that I have briefly outlined above. It is the mosque in each community which is its most potent symbol of Islam, a symbol which itself condenses the identity of the community. Given the universal nature of matrilocal residence among Sri Lankan Muslims, a factor we can only attribute to Islam, it might then be assumed that in the area of fundamentally

---

<sup>44</sup> The Kandyan Sinhalese recognize two forms of marriage *binna* (matrilocal) and *deega* (patrilocal). There is a distinct preference for patrilocal residence after marriage and these marriages have higher status (Yalman, *ibid*:122-123).

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed (1993) however argues that uxori-local post-marital residence was a popular choice in the Middle East at the time of initial Arab settlement in Sri Lanka.



religious practice, there would be little dramatic variation. As we have seen above however this is not the case. The difference in the structure of mosque organisation is clearly a reflection of the different community structures within which mosques are constituted. I have referred all too briefly to three areas in Sri Lanka and have no information concerning other areas and thus I am vastly oversimplifying a complex question. However within those constraints it would appear feasible to argue the following points. Initially, that it is a variation in the original local kinship structure in each case, rather than any perceptible doctrinal difference which is the more significant factor in determining the structure of mosque organisation and control. It may be possible to extend this line of argument as there are some indications in the data that doctrinal or ideological difference, when it does occur between areas, is determined to some extent by the already existent distinctions in social structure. The success of the Tabliq movement in the Kandy area for instance, may be due to the already institutionalized ideology of communal control. Secondly, if variation in mosque organisation is a direct reflection of a variation in the kinship structure in each area, then it is an undeniable assertion of the fact that it is the community in a very real sense which constitutes the mosque.

## Chapter Six:

### The Mosque - Ideology and Practice

The mosque is the symbol of a Muslim community. It signs each community as a distinct entity and also unites all communities within the wider Islamic world in relations of equivalence. Mosques constitute the central arena for religious practice and the establishment of cohesive identity within the village. In this cultural context they are sacred spaces linked to both Heaven and Mecca. In this chapter I examine the ideology and practice of the mosque feast - the annual ritual at all mosques. This is followed by an examination of four very different events at four mosques in the research area in which the significance of the mosque as a symbol of egalitarian ideology is further elaborated.

#### 6.1 The Structure of the Mosque Feast

The mosque feast, *palli kandoori*,<sup>1</sup> is understood as the supreme exercise of egalitarian ideology. Central to the feast is the practice of Muslims sharing their food; seated on the floor, six to a large ritual bowl - *saban*, from which they eat directly with their hands. In this act they sign their status as equals and their participation in the brotherhood of Islam. Within the context of an hierarchical caste based society, in which inter-caste dining is rarely practiced, this unfettered commensality is all the more striking.<sup>2</sup> The feasts, which are held annually in all the mosques are organized in each case by individual village communities. Through the performance of this ritual villagers sign their identity as a cohesive unit defined by a mosque. There are two arenas of participation in the mosque feast. The men are engaged in a celebration as the egalitarian community of Muslim males, and households celebrate as the reproductive kin-groups that constitute a Muslim village. Both are inextricably linked in an overall

---

<sup>1</sup> *kanduri* is an Indo-Persian word whose literal meaning is "tablecloth" (Woodward, *ibid*:64) and/or "napkin" (Herklots, *ibid*:201).

<sup>2</sup> Kapferer (1983:73) argues that "food is integral in the cultural status code", symbolizing the quality of social relationships and "in signing the relative status of the parties... (T)o share the intimacy of a meal, is to imbue a relationship with great symbolic import" (*ibid*, *op cit*). To share a meal with five others, eating with your hands from one common bowl is to radically sign egalitarian values.



understanding which celebrates the reproductive Muslim village in an annual ritual of regeneration.

The feasts vary slightly from one village to another but follow a common general structure, and each feast is associated with the Prophet or a particular saint. Every evening for ten days a mowlood is recited in the mosque by a group of six to twenty men of the village.<sup>3</sup> The mowlood recitation is followed by the distribution of ghee rice and the rice is taken home and consumed by individual households.<sup>4</sup> On the last two nights feasts are held in the grounds of the mosque itself. The final night sees a large public feast which is attended by people from all the villages. On the occasion of the feast the street outside the mosque is lined with small stalls selling sweets and trinkets. The mosque itself is extensively decorated with coloured lights. These completely festive occasions sometimes includes entertainment in the form of a martial arts display and frequently continue until two or three in the morning.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> In the cases of a few mosques the normal mowlood recital period is twelve days.

<sup>4</sup> Ghee rice is rice boiled with ghee and coconut milk.

<sup>5</sup> These displays of martial arts may vary considerably and are not included in all the feasts. They are however, sufficiently common to be considered an integral possibility of feast structure. Dale and Menon have noted them at feasts in Kerala (ibid:526). The Kapuwatta feast in 1984 included a *kolkali* (stick-fighting display) (Sinhala *le keliya*), by a group of young men from Tangalle. Thawfeeq, (ibid:57) bemoans the decline in the martial arts among Muslims, a factor he attributed to their no longer living in "small concentrations" and needing these skills as a form of defending "their homes, women and lands" (ibid, op cit). The idea of martial arts however is still in the public arena. At the Porwai Mosque feast in Godepitiya in 1985, this aspect of ethnic tensions was explicitly depicted in a staged fight by students of a Muslim martial arts group. A number of the students played the parts of Sinhalese arrack-drinking thugs, well armed with knives, broken bottles and broken fluorescent tubes. The "thugs" proceeded to attack the "Muslim" (the martial arts expert), and were summarily dealt with and hurled off the stage, much to the delight of the assembled crowd. Thawfeeq notes that the "tragedy of the Kerbala" (where the Prophet's grandson Hussain was murdered) used to be re-enacted throughout the island, but is these days rarely seen (ibid:56). The Hassan/Hussain mosque in Denypitiya also included displays of martial arts in the 1984 and 1985 feasts. When a scuffle broke out on the road near this mosque, during the display at the 1985 feast, the rapidity with which the gates were shut was astonishing. There was no idle curiosity, simply an instant defence of the group. There is a big fascination with martial arts in the country generally. They are a feature of many of the popular Hindi films, and pictures of the Buddha, the Hindu gods and Bruce Lee, vie for popularity amongst the drivers of three-wheeler taxis, who



The details below are taken from the annual feast at Kapuwatta where most people are followers of the Rifai tariqa and the mowlood is recited in honour of Sultanul Arifeen Seyedna Ahmed Kabeer Rifai. At sunset on the first evening the flags are raised, stretching between the mosque and a nearby tree.<sup>6</sup> Then a group of village men together with their spiritual leader Nalla Koya Thangal, the village kalifas from the Rifai order and the imam, gather in the mosque and recite the mowlood which is broadcast to the village at large. The Arabic recital is followed by a condensed Tamil version of the story. On each of the first eight evenings the ghee rice is donated by particular persons within the village, and is taken to the mosque as the mowlood is due to end. The donors are generally from the more wealthy, established families, and the donation is clearly understood as a **household** gift, condensed in the male head of the family. There are however occasions when two or more male business partners who have come by their wealth more recently, may combine to provide the feast as **partners**, rather than as kin. There is an explicit understanding within Islam that Muslims should pursue wealth, in order to provide for themselves and their families, and further that the wealthy should **provide** for the poorer sections of the community.<sup>7</sup> A common saying locally is

that you should look after the affairs of this world as if you would live forever, and after the affairs of the next as if you would die tomorrow.

Economic pursuits can thus be read as a religious duty, and the donors, as business partners or as reproductive kin-groups, represent both aspects of the Islamic community.

---

invariably display one or another of them.

<sup>6</sup> The flags are not a common feature of all the feasts, in fact they appear only at the Kapuwatta and Kaparatota Mosque feasts. They are a variety of shapes and sizes but are invariably green or green and white. The flags are kept at the mosque and are attached to the rope on a 'first come-first served basis. It was suggested by a few informants that the flags in a sense represented those who attached them on that occasion and of course the possibility of providing new flags always exists.

<sup>7</sup> One donor, a professional cook, and by no means a member of the village elite, stated that he was not a Rifai Tariqa member, but that as he was "a wealthy man, he must give **niyaath**" (a vowed gift). Another donor also was not a member of "any fixed tariqa" but his family had been donors for forty years, and he himself had been a donor for the last fifteen years, because his father had made a vow "and had been blessed with a son". He was continuing to discharge his father's duty.



The Kapuwatta feast was first instituted with the building of a new mosque in 1886 and there are "traditional" rights to provide the ghee rice on a particular night and these rights are both jealously guarded and universally recognized. The provision of rice for the community demonstrates publicly the family's current social and financial standing. Further, from the point of view of the family itself, to give rice to the village is an act of religiously valued generosity (**zakat**) which is a means of guaranteeing that social and financial position in the future.

Zakat ("taken to mean "purification" from the verb zaka which signifies "to thrive", "to be wholesome", "to be pure"). The giving up of a portion of the wealth one may possess, in excess of what is needed for sustenance, to "purify" or legitimize what one retains (Glassé, 1989:430).

There is, of course, some shift in the list of donors as family fortunes wax and wane but places forfeited are not easily won back. The donors for the mosque feasts can be read, quite literally, as a statement of current village rank. It is the **duty** of the wealthy to provide food for the feast and thus hierarchy, in this instance, may be read as asserting an ultimate egalitarian value.

The ghee rice that is provided for the first eight (or ten) evenings of the feast is prepared by the donor household and delivered to the mosque for distribution during the mowlood recital. This ghee rice is always cooked by men, (often hired for the purpose), on a temporary fireplace constructed in the garden of the donor's household, thus constituting a male domestic hearth.<sup>8</sup> It is the task of women, (both household and hired) to scrape all the coconuts in order to provide the coconut milk that is required for the rice. Generally the male head of the household, the donor of that evening's feast will put the "first **shatti**" (the first pot of rice), or "pour the first milk" (paal uthinga), in this way symbolically signing his own cooking of the evening's feast. To have an elderly person pour the milk or 'put the rice', additionally increases the family's baraka, here interpreted as prosperity. In this context where men never cook at all and where kitchens are entirely the preserve of women, the "cooking" of food by men is highly significant. On this occasion it is they who "nurture" the village with food through the aegis of the mosque.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ritual cooking by males has been noted in the context of Tamil **ponkal** by Good (1983:232), and by Kapferer amongst the Sinhalese (1983).

On the final two evenings of the mowlood recitals the focus shifts to the mosque and the feast is prepared there, on specially prepared hearths within the grounds, by a team of professional cooks.<sup>9</sup> The feast becomes far more elaborate on the last two evenings. On the penultimate night there is a village feast with ghee rice and five traditional curries prepared from food donated to the mosque by the people of the village itself. The curries provided are always identical at every feast ; ash plantain and brinjal, potato, dahl, achari (a type of uncooked chutney cured with lime juice), and beef curry. The donated bulls will be sacrificially killed on land immediately outside the mosque grounds, as the prohibitions against the taking of life in the haram area extend to the grounds of the mosque.

No individual or kin-group may intrude upon the rights to provide food on the final two evenings. The donors are villagers and supporters and they may donate bulls, foodstuffs or money, but no one person or group is held to be the donor. All donations in the context of a feast are regarded as **niyaath** or **nershey** and express the payment of vows made earlier by individuals.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, on the ninth night, village identity becomes incorporated in the mosque, and the hearth is that of the mosque. While this evening's feast is a village affair, the final evening, the occasion of The Grand Feast is open to all Muslims. The crowds in attendance are large and van-loads of people from Colombo, Galle,

---

<sup>9</sup> These are Muslim men who cook professionally, usually on a part-time basis, throughout the research area. Cooking is not their only employment nor is it an occupation determined by caste. They cook for village feasts, marriage, home-coming and circumcision feasts.

<sup>10</sup> Niyaath is from the Persian **niyaz** meaning "blessed food" (Gaborieau, 1984:246). The term nershey is less commonly used locally, but is most likely a derivative of a Dravidian term, similar to the term **necca**, used in Kerala. "**Necc** means the act of taking a vow; it is a Malayalam word derived from the Dravidian root **ner**, a word with several meanings including "truth" and "agreement". Several variants of the word clearly express the concept of a commitment to worship and make offerings, at a mosque or to a non-Muslim deity, if prayers are granted" (Dale and Menon, 1978:525). Locally there is little if any propitiation of non-Muslim deities. I observed one family that took their new bus to Kataragama to ensure it's safety - an act commonly seen amongst the Sinhalese. I heard of one other occasion on which a Muslim family had a Sinhalese exorcist perform a minor exorcism for them in which he cut limes to ward off demonic attention. Limes are considered purifying by both communities.



Matara and elsewhere stop at the households of their friends and relatives before the men move off to the mosque. The ghee rice and the curries have been prepared in enormous quantities and much of it is then placed into woven coconut-palm baskets lined with leaves. These baskets which are intended for consumption in the surrounding households are sold to all comers for a minimum of twenty Rupees. The palm leaf baskets are prepared in the same way as the sabans for the men. Each has rice and five curries and they are consumed in all the households by the women and children. On the penultimate evening the village as a whole consumes a ritual feast prepared on the mosque hearth by the men. The relations between mosque and village are clearly expressed in the pattern of this feast, where the mosque is constitutive of both; the households where the women eat and the male community which eats within the mosque building and in the grounds. On the final evening in the Grand Feast the village as a whole, through the agency of the mosque provides food for, and celebrates its relation to, the wider Muslim community. The feast structure, taken in its entirety is a progressive reconstitution of the ummah within the egalitarian ideal of Islam. The feast both recognizes the established social order, and at the same time overcomes the inherent tensions within it, through its reconstitutive egalitarian ritual.

The entire feast structure may be read as a comprehensive statement of village identity; an identity which has two levels. First there is a village identity in the sense of a **bounded** entity, clearly distinguished from the wider world. The second sense of village identity refers to the village as a **corporate** entity; one which realizes its correct internal ordering through the structure of the feast. The first sense is already clear. I have pointed out above that the identity of the village is condensed within the meaning of the mosque, and in the annual mosque feast the village as an entity plays host to the wider Islamic community. The second sense, the village as a corporate entity, is more problematic. The village **realizes** its correct internal ordering through the **logic** of the feast structure. The feast structure has a logic which increasingly intensifies the relations between the villagers and the mosque and moves the mosque into dominant relation with the village. It also, at the same time, essays a transformation within the village; a movement from a community located **in space** around its village mosque but internally divided by forces of stratification, to a community which is completely united **in space and time** through the ritual of the annual mosque feast.

This transformative logic operates on a number of levels concurrently and in all of them it is incorporative. The first and most obvious is the ideology of ritual commensality in the feast which is taken-for-granted by the Muslim community as signifying their egalitarian practice. The communal sharing of a common meal is clearly a ritual of incorporation; a ritual in which individual Muslims celebrate their membership of a wider Islamic community. The second level of incorporation is through the celebration of the mowlood itself. The evening recitals of the mowlood present the prophet or saint as exemplary figures, models for the community's intentions. The mowlood (birthday) which commemorates the death of the saint in fact celebrates his "birth" into eternal life (Von Grunebaum, 1988; 80). The feast is always linked to a particular saint and all the food and offerings are niyaath - redeemed vows. In some cases the saint is loosely tied to the identity of the village and is a potential subject of, and model for, their religious intentions. Their explicit intention through the performance of this ritual feast is to reconstitute an Islamic community.<sup>11</sup> A third aspect of this incorporative logic concerns the movement of food through the village community; a movement which successively incorporates all village households into the hearth of the mosque. Cooked food moves from a series of different and dominant household hearths into the mosque and from there it is distributed to every house. The crescendo comes in the final two evenings when uncooked foods and offerings from every house are prepared on a mosque hearth.<sup>12</sup> The mosque becomes dominant and regenerative - or alternatively it is the religious aspect of regeneration which becomes dominant. The villagers at this point are condensed within the mosque and the mosque has become a house.

The mosque is metaphorically a male house, unlike the female, matrilocal house in which all men live. In a context where

---

<sup>11</sup> The saint of the Kapuwatta mowlood recital, Suthanul Arifeen Seyedna Ahmed Kabeer Rifai, is not the saint interred in their shrine. These "lesser" saints are attended to during the feast, but by individuals and not through the group mowlood ritual.

<sup>12</sup> There were also donations from much further afield. The published accounts for the Kapuwatta Annual Feast of 1984 included Muslim donors from Colombo, Galle and Matara, and all of the local villages and town areas. Of approximately 700 listed donors, just under 10% were local Sinhalese from the nearby villages of Wataragedaramulla, Denypitiya and Mirissagoda. Donations totalled more than 50,000 Rupees and the cost of the feast was 43,000 Rupees.



historically Islam and men are conceived to be foreign, and where all men remain foreigners in the houses of their wives, the enormous significance of this "male house" should not be underestimated. The mosque is the house of a foreign Islam, and the location for the rituals which celebrate its brotherhood. The mosque hearth must also be primarily understood as a **generative** hearth, as the domestic hearth (identified with local wife) is generative of the Muslim family. The mosque hearth, through the annual mosque feast, is clearly a metaphor of the regeneration of the Islamic ummah.<sup>13</sup>

It is further possible to argue that the shift from cooked to uncooked food marks a transition from a less pure form of food to the most pure; an understanding that is culturally viable for Sinhalese (Kapferer, 1983:74), and Tamils in this context. The structure of pollution ideology for Muslims is somewhat different and the bars on accepting cooked food from others are theoretically not evident. It is a possible element however and worth further enquiry. The logic behind the shift from cooked to uncooked food is more readily explained as an appropriation by the mosque of the regenerative power when food is transformed by cooking.

The combination of rice and coconut milk as milk-rice is understood in this cultural context as a combination of male semen (rice) and female milk. Sinhalese Buddhists prepare a dish of set rice known as kiri-bat, the Muslims a similar one called **pacchoru**, and Tamil Hindus produce a milky-white rice known as **ponkal**, regarded as "the epitome of prosperity" (Good, ibid:235). These dishes are always served on ritual occasions. I am not suggesting that the ghee rice is the same dish, because it clearly is not, but it would be unwise to overlook the particular combination of male and female elements (rice and milk) as one aspect of the meaning of this food in the context of the feast. I note again that while the **pacchoru** of other occasions is prepared entirely by women within the household on the everyday domestic hearth, this dish is prepared by men on a ritual hearth in the household lands. The ghee rice moreover requires the use of males to cook and females to provide the coconut milk, and thus combines

---

<sup>13</sup> This logic is further extended by the fact that the mosque hearth, located in the grounds of the mosque, is adjacent to the sacred space of the shrine and the haram space of the mosque. The male, regenerative mosque hearth is firmly located within a totally Islamic order, in sharp yet complementary contrast to the female domestic hearth.

both male and female labour and male and female food. Cooking (or transforming) these elements creates a regenerative food. It is the individual households of the donors which are the sites of regeneration in the early days of the feast celebrations and the food is distributed from the mosque. But in the final days the focus shifts radically to the mosque and the uncooked food offerings of individuals are transformed on its hearth and it is the mosque which emerges as the regenerative heart of the whole Islamic community.

The fourth and final element of incorporation, is one which creates the Islamic individuals who make up the Islamic community, from the stratified and divided village. I have stated above that the feast structure increasingly intensifies the relations between the villagers and the mosque, and places the mosque in dominant relation to them. Within the ten day period the donors move from the village individuals (those whose importance within the village structure is determined largely by their earthly, economic endeavours), to the Islamic individuals whose rights to donate the feast of the final two evenings are sacrosanct. The initial "nurturance" of the village is by a number of wealthy men, kin-groups, and business partners - the ideals of successful Muslim men, (as heads of families) who, in accordance with their religious belief - provide food for others. At this point in the ritual structure these donors begin the process of incorporation of the village through their provision of the ghee rice which all households consume. Their position here is one of dominance, but its meaning is multi-valent. They signify their economic dominance in their ability to provide the food, and their adherence to Islamic law in their willingness to provide for others. But as representatives they also incorporate within themselves their families, kin-groups and business interests. Within the village, extended kin-groups commonly have several houses standing near each other and as donors may incorporate the labour of neighbours in the food preparation, the feast appears to cover different areas of the village on successive nights. This gives the movement of the feast and its orientation to and through the mosque, a spatial element within the village which should not be discounted.

On the final two days however, all donations (niyaaths) are from individuals. In the case of the Kapuwatta Feast a list of donors is published and each and every person who makes a donation is listed individually. Thus all members of a single family make individual donations and any of the representative characteristics of the



dominant donors are stripped from them at this point. This is critical. In its ritual practice, Islam does not merely assert an ideology of egalitarianism against the stratificatory tensions of everyday life, it creates it.

The logic of the feast structure re-orders the community internally. There is a shift in the donors from big individuals within the village to all individuals within the mosque. The stratified village community, whose internal orders are a product of an imperfect social world, is, at a high point within the ritual structure, reduced, to a collection of individuals, who individually make their offerings to the mosque. From this body of newly constituted individuals arises the Islamic order which celebrates the feast; males in egalitarian relation within the mosque and women in reproductive kin-groups in the surrounding households. It is ultimately in the religious community of the mosque, that individual autonomy is realized, and not within the social orders of family and kin-groups.

The feasts are clearly complex. They encode statements about village identity, about the relationships between the mosque and the village and they engage an ideology of egalitarianism in practice. At this point I explore the meaning of the mosque in more detail in order to discuss egalitarian ideology. As the symbol of both the community and the religion itself, the meaning of the mosque as revealed in local discourse, symbolically condenses further information about the particular egalitarian ideology that is the basis of Islam in Southern Sri Lanka.

Through an analysis of events concerned with four mosques in the area it is possible to reveal symbolic, social and political dimensions of this egalitarian ideology as it is engaged in religious practice by the communities in which the mosques are located. There are four quite different events and they take place in villages with distinct characteristics but they are all concerned with a fundamental Islamic ideology of egalitarianism and religious practice. There are two cases where villages elected to establish new Jumma Mosques within areas previously associated with another Jumma Mosque, and there is a case where the building of a new mosque has come to a standstill over the question of who has the right to build it. The first case that I discuss however, is concerned with the opening of a new mosque, and although community concerns with egalitarianism are not the critical element of this discussion it

provides great insight into the community meaning of a mosque and the rituals of its "birth". It indicates precisely to what extent the community and its mosque are tied in a dialectical relation of regeneration.

## 6.2 Wellipitiya - The Ritual Opening of a New Mosque.

This village had outgrown its original mosque, constructed in 1885, and the wealthiest of the local businessmen had organized and funded the building of a new mosque, immediately opposite the original. The ceremonies of the "Opening Day" began with a ritual consecration of the mosque. This was followed by a small feast in the grounds. After this the Jumma prayer was held and then in the evening there was a large mosque feast. Each of these events which make up the day is examined in turn, for the "birth" of a mosque is a highly significant occasion, one in which the community interprets for itself the nature of the religious world in which they live.

The opening ceremony takes the form of a dedication or gift to Allah and although a simple ritual it achieves the transformation of the building from mundane to sacred space. This is paralleled by a shift in ownership, of the building and its grounds. It marks the point at which this building and the land cease to belong to the donor and his family, and become the **inalienable** property of Allah. The lands of the mosque proper will be distinguished from the garden lands in which it stands and whose produce may be still divided among members of the original family or granted to the mosque in perpetuity.<sup>14</sup> On the same day as the new Jumma mosque becomes the new symbol of the community, the old mosque across the road "will be broken" and turned into a Qur'an Madrasa. This involved breaking the **minbar**, from which the Jumma sermon is preached, and represents a ritual "desacralization" process before the building may be put to other use. The building still belongs to the religious community, and may only be put to religious use. As a Qur'an Madrasa it will however, have male and female students within an area that was formerly haram, sacred precincts in this case restricted to males. The minbar itself is rendered a symbol of the egalitarian male community, and the breaking of the minbar effectively signs the new order of this building, which is no longer a mosque.

---

<sup>14</sup> A dispute has arisen in Kapuwatta over the garden lands associated with the mosque.



At mid-day on a Friday the new mosque stood apparently empty, although there were three moulavis inside out of sight. Faintly in the distance could be heard the singing of a large crowd of men. There were several small girls running around dressed in their finest clothes but there were no women in evidence at all.<sup>15</sup> The men of the village, together with a large number of visiting men from the area made their way along the main road through the village, towards the mosque. They were singing a mowlood as they walked, and alerting everyone in the village to their presence. Finally they moved through the gates of the mosque and assembled outside the main door. The male congregation confronted the new mosque building.

This was an occasion in which religion and religious office were stressed through codes of dress. There were a large number of men who indicated with their dress that they held some religious office as a result of religious study. One old man arrived dressed in an old and tattered silver lamé cloak, over a heavily embroidered burgundy shirt. He was wearing the coiled rope on his head over a cloth ,

---

<sup>15</sup> I have stated that women never eat at the mosque feast, and some feast advertisements (Porwai for example) state clearly in large print "THE FEAST WILL NOT BE SERVED TO LADIES". They do however occasionally slip through the darkness to observe the festivities. Kapuwatta is the clear exception here where a crowd of women witness the performance of the Rifai Rathib from one side of the mosque. The position of pre-pubescent girls stands in marked contrast to the position of women. Although they never enter the haram area of the mosque itself and they do not eat the feast at the mosque, there is no restriction on their attendance at any festivity and they are often in evidence, in all their finery, having come along with fathers and brothers. During any mosque festivities they will either observe proceedings from the doorway, or alternatively, spend the time running, shouting and gossiping with their friends outside. A good indication to me of the community's idea of the solemnity of an occasion, was the level of restriction placed on my position for observation of the event. (See Hastrup, 1995:55 on self as informant.) The greatest area of sensitivity by far, was the Jumma prayer - the daylight, male congregational prayer. My presence within the mosque building on all other occasions, was unproblematic, though I was of course restricted to the non-haram areas and observed performances from the doorway. To my surprise when I enquired I was told that it was not necessary for me to cover my head within the mosque; a clear statement of my 'otherness'. This particular mosque opening involved the consecration of a new mosque and was specifically held to coincide with the Jumma prayer. This meant that I had to observe from a discreet distance. The mosque donor explained however, that it was rather a problem of what "orthodox outsiders" may think, than any personal or local objection.

after the Arab fashion and people said he was from Galle.<sup>16</sup> When the students from the Weligama zawia and takia arrived the crowd parted to allow them to move through towards the front. Someone from the congregation outside the mosque called out loudly, and three turbanned moulavis shortly appeared in the doorway. There was a brief series of exchanges between the two parties and then a communal recitation of three **rakats**<sup>17</sup> before the moulavis turned, and the congregation followed them into the mosque, some stopping at the hawl for ablutions on the way. The men all prayed individually facing the qiblah along lines that were already incorporated into the floor design.

This simple series of ritual actions transformed the building from mundane to sacred space, subject to ritual prescriptions. This highlights the transformative power inherent in Islamic egalitarian ideology engaged in religious practice. In stark contrast to a Christian ceremony of consecration where an ordained Bishop may perform similar rituals by virtue of the power of God already **invested in him**, here the power resides in the male community who **gift** the building to God. The essential elements for Islam are a male religious congregation (by definition egalitarian) **witnessing** their **contract** before Allah. The first three rakats performed communally, took place at the door of the mosque. This is significant **marginal** space, and the congregation who were outside facing into the mosque, confronted the three moulavis who were inside and facing out towards the congregation. At the moment of transformation, during the prayers, **none of them were facing Mecca**. Thus this ritual series of actions is not to be interpreted as communal prayer pure and simple. They are not discharging their obligatory duties, they stand as a male community with each other and God as witness to their intention.

---

<sup>16</sup> This man was understood by those I spoke to as signing his descent from Arabic traders in Galle. There is room for confusion with the dress codes however. At a Kapuwatta feast, a man wearing a turban, who was obviously not a moulavi, was excitedly pointed out to me as someone "from Yemen". He was in fact, from Colombo, and in attendance with friends from the village. The wearing of turbans was strictly a ceremonial affair.

<sup>17</sup> A rakat is a "cycle of sacred words" from the ritual prayers (Glassé, *ibid*:329).



What it alerts us to is the power of a contract witnessed by a male Muslim community.<sup>18</sup> This building has become another mosque.<sup>19</sup>

When the Jumma prayers are completed the men assemble outside in the grounds where a stage has been set up and there are addresses by a number of speakers. There are five speakers in all but interestingly, not one of them is the man who built the mosque and nor does anyone refer to his generosity.<sup>20</sup> The Trustee of the Kataragama Mosque,<sup>21</sup> and the Director of the South Ceylon Regional Office of the Islamic Secretariat related the story of Imam Shafi upon whose teachings the Shafi school was founded. Another man told the parable about Muhammad's experience when he first came back after the Mihraj (when he was taken to Heaven one night on the back of a magnificent steed - al-Buraq). This miraculous event is one which has originary

---

<sup>18</sup> The power of a contract witnessed by a male congregation is striking among the Muslims. It is also the fundamental element of the **Nikah** (marriage) ceremony. This all-male affair, often held some time before the "cultural" marriage ceremonial, is regarded as the "actual" moment of marriage (see Chapter Eight).

<sup>19</sup> Gilsenan (1982) in his article on "forming and transforming space" does not actually discuss the **creation** of sacred space as I have here. He refers rather to the "effects" of sacred space upon individuals engaged in feuds within the village.

<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, I had heard much gossip in previous weeks, about the fact that he was "buying himself a big name". Everyone believed that they knew the cost of the mosque and lands (36 lakh - a lakh is one hundred thousand Rupees), and no-one it seemed was impressed. Many people were critical of his largesse on this occasion, stating that a mosque "half the size" would have been sufficient and that he could have used the rest of the money "to help people marry their daughters". This is a reference to the 'dowry problem', the custom of providing a dowry being a 'pernicious un-Islamic practice', and a particular burden for the poor. The mosque had been built in what was billed by the architects as "the flat roofed Malaysian style", thus marking a departure from the usual style which reflects a Middle-Eastern or Mughal influence. It does not suggest however, the development of any closer links with the local Malay community. It may be argued to be making a symbolic connection with another South Asian site of Islamic conversion. Links with Malaysia are a facet of local discourse and when celebrating the centenary of Baari Arabic College, local Trustees invited a number of religious dignitaries from Malaysia (who were ultimately unable to attend). Alternatively the significance of the mosque style may be as mundane as the fact that the design was drawn up by a Colombo Malay, Muslim architect, who works for the firm which recently designed the new Parliament House in Kotte. Needless to say, the cachet was not greatly commented upon locally.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Haj H.H.A.Gaffar from Galle. The imam of the Kataragama mosque is from Weligama. In 1986 a new set of rooms for Muslim pilgrims was opened there.

significance in the establishment of the religion itself, according to local interpretation (Thawfeeq, ibid:50-52), and is entirely apposite on this ordinary day. On his return, Muhammad explained his journey and the fact that he had seen the seven heavens but apart from Aboobakr Siddeek, the populace refused to believe him. Intrigued by Aboobakr's faith however, they began to question him at length, and as he answered all their questions convincingly they also came to believe. The central points of the parable stress the possibility of miracles and the potential strength of faith. The series of speeches concluded with a recounting of Islamic history and finally the customary children's competitive Qur'an recitals.<sup>22</sup> After the morning ritual and the speeches there was food for all who had attended.

The opening of the mosque was explicitly timed to immediately precede the Jumma prayer. This timing is entirely consistent with the logic that sees the Jumma as "heaven on earth" - a point of conjunction, of the mundane and the sacred worlds, and the appropriate occasion for the transformation of mundane to sacred space.

The day of Jum'a is of the hereafter, and not of this world, it is a day of light and knowledge, a day of devotion and remembrance of God (M.M.Shukri, unpublished thesis, Al-Makri, Edinburgh;95).

There was widespread attendance by men from all the villages in the surrounding area at the Jumma prayer at this mosque on its opening day. This signifies an extension of the Jumma to its widest possibility in the local area, and an endorsement by all, of the new mosque. The evening feast, which followed the pattern I have outlined above marked the transition of the mosque into community use.

The small feast immediately following the morning's ritual, and the very first food provided in connection with this mosque was entirely different to that usually provided in the context of a mosque feast. The bulk of this food (pacchoru [milk-rice], maldivian fish sambol and rotti), had been prepared by the women and sent along to the mosque for distribution. There was also a mutton curry, prepared in the grounds by the men. In this cultural context both milk rice and fish are to be read as symbols of fertility, with a particular connotation of "birth". Both items are included in all *aqiqa* (head-shaving) and

---

<sup>22</sup> These Qur'an recitals for boys and girls, are an aspect of many of the community's celebrations.



naming ceremonies for new Muslim babies, all circumcision households (whether a public feast is held or not), and all feasts which celebrate the consummation of new marriages. Respectively these rituals signify the birth of a new Muslim child, the birth of a newly circumcised, therefore marriageable young man at puberty, and the birth of a new Muslim marital union. In each case it is a new Muslim potential or fertility that is recognized. The rotti signifies a gift of female fertility to the mosque.<sup>23</sup> Mutton curry is usually a special dish of domestic occasions, and never used in a mosque feast.

However, on this occasion, this "domestic" dish is prepared by men in the grounds of the mosque. Its inclusion here is entirely consistent with a logic of birth celebrations. Each new-born child should have a goat sacrificed on its behalf on the occasion of its aqiga.<sup>24</sup> The first feast of the new mosque, must be interpreted as a "birth" feast, sharing the specific ritual dishes (in particular pacchoru and fish) of all other "births" in the community. In addition however, there is the required sacrifice of a goat, and preparation of a mutton curry on the mosque hearth, by the men, and the gift of rotti prepared on the household hearths of the women. In radical distinction to normal mosque feast practice the household hearths of the village women are combined in fruitful relation with the collective hearth of the men in this first mosque feast. This conjunction of foods which are symbolic of fertility and male and female reproductive capacity is logically required for the "birth" of a new mosque. The first feast is a powerful symbol of reproductive village unity and identity, an identity which is condensed in the symbol of the new mosque itself.

### 6.3 Kapuwatta - Community Cooperation Builds a New Mosque.

In this instance a village that had no mosque of its own, built a new Jumma mosque and subsequently, established a branch of the Rifai

---

<sup>23</sup> An extended discussion of the significance of rotti is included in Chapter Seven.

<sup>24</sup> This is not a ritual performed by most families in the area, but knowledge of the requirement is wide-spread. While the goat on this occasion was sacrificed in the morning, the cattle for the evening feast were left standing in an adjacent field until after the first feast. The cooks then had to work rapidly all afternoon to prepare the evening feast.

tariqa which was new to the area.<sup>25</sup> In this process they effectively re-negotiated their status vis-a-vis the established orthodoxy located in Galbokka, and established a distinct village identity from Koledande, where they had formerly attended Jumma prayers.

During the late nineteenth century there was an economic struggle going on between the local villages, at the same time as the economy of the island itself was transforming. In the research area, religious discourse and claims to orthodoxy formed one of the arenas in which this struggle took place. I have argued that Kapuwatta historically stood in a subordinate relation, in economic and religious terms, to other villages in the area. Economic dominance is interpreted in part, as religiously legitimated and in local practice, economic success is generally followed by increased religious observance. Through Kapuwatta's establishment of a separate and cohesive identity, condensed within their own Jumma mosque, they were able to renegotiate their economic and religious relations.

This village had no mosque at this time and through their engagement of an influential and charismatic religious outsider, they succeeded in building a Jumma mosque and establishing themselves as independently orthodox. The story of the building of the mosque highlights a number of themes which appear consistently in the history of Islam in the South and West of the island and indicate the direction of religious consolidation. Two of these themes are the "drawing in" of religious orthodoxy from outside in order to purify local religious experience and concomitantly a widespread understanding that signs "Middle Eastern" dress and a facility with Arabic as clear evidence of religious knowledge. These themes are constant metaphors of the understanding of the original arrival of the religion with Arab traders.

In the 1880's a group of Sri Lankan Muslims were attending a religious festival in Hyderabad and while there they were very impressed with the religious knowledge, and ability to speak and write Arabic, of a man they encountered. He was Seyed Mohammed Rifai Moulana Kolyad from Androth Island off the coast of Kerala.

---

<sup>25</sup> Also at this time relatively new to the island. There have since been branches of the Rifai tariqa established in Matara, Godepitiya, Colombo, and Kandy.



As a matter of fact he had such a stately figure and in his flowing robes looked every inch an aristocratic Arab and everyone thought him to be so (Nalla Koya Thangal, 1985,p.c.).

They invited him to travel back to Sri Lanka. This he did and he attended the Buhari Feast, the annual religious festival and feast at the Beruwela mosque. It was here that he was seen by some men from Kapuwatta and Godepitiya who were equally impressed with his demeanour, and they invited him to come to Kapuwatta to visit and instruct them. In another version of the story it was stated that this Seyyed had come to Godepitiya to the Porwai Mosque "to see his relation buried in the tomb there". At this time a Kapuwatta man, one Noohu Lebbe, was visiting there and he had called to the Seyyed (Rifai Moulana) saying "Come Thangal, to Kapuwatta because there are Muslims there, but they have no place to pray to Allah". The Thangal duly came to Kapuwatta and made a mosque from **cadjan** (woven coconut leaves). He returned a year later to build a small cement mosque. On this occasion he brought with him, his elder brother's son (**marumahan**), Seyyed Mohammed Faleel Fookoya Thangal, who was a sixteen year old student. Rifai Moulana charged the boy to rebuild the mosque and make it bigger as soon as he was able. After Rifai Moulana's death, Faleel Fookoya spent many years rebuilding the mosque.<sup>26</sup> The mosque that he completed is the current Kapuwatta Mohideen Jumma Mosque. He was assisted in the building by Rifai Moulana Yoosuf Koya Thangal who later died in Galle, but was buried in the Kapuwatta Mosque where his tomb is now in the shrine.

Seyyed Faleel Fookoya Thangal is locally known as "rice moulana" or "ration Moulana" because in order to build the mosque he had each of the eighty families in the village keep a small "till". As the women cooked each meal they would take measures of rice for each member of the household, and at the same time place a measure in the till. At the end of each week this rice was taken to the mosque and from there it was sold to the wealthy people of the village and the money collected was put aside for the building of the mosque. This Moulana is remembered well for his single-mindedness and during all the periods he spent in Kapuwatta over the years building the mosque, he refused to open any letters from home, saying that he did not want to be distracted from God's work. This also signs the originary nature of his work.

---

<sup>26</sup> This was between 1913 and 1927.

From the time of the initial invitation to the Moulana to come to Kapuwatta for the spiritual benefit of the Muslims living there, this Androth Island family has established a position of religious dominance within this community.<sup>27</sup> Seyyed Mohammed Rifai Moulana, as orthodox outsider, was initially responsible for constructing the first village Jumma Mosque which gave the village its primary symbol of distinct and independent religious identity, no longer encompassed by the Galbokka or Koledande Jumma Mosques.<sup>28</sup> The power and religious authority of the Moulana helped to confirm Kapuwatta's identity as an independent religious community with its own Jumma mosque. The introduction of the Rifai tariqa made it radically distinct.

This event is also a further elaboration of the metaphor of food, as constitutive of relations. This is the fundamental logic which underlies the ritual commensality of the mosque feast and which appears in a different form in the cases of new mosque constitution. The use of daily offerings of household rice to build the communal house of prayer is richly symbolic of the community constituting its mosque. This concept is regularly elaborated in the structure of

---

<sup>27</sup> The Androth Island Moulanas are also the spiritual leaders of Rifai groups in Colombo, Godepitiya, Matara and Singapore.

<sup>28</sup> In their move into Kapuwatta they disturbed the local religious hierarchy. There were a number of Moulana families living in the research area (especially in New Street but also in Wellipitiya) and they were highly regarded. Prior to this however there had been no Moulanas in Kapuwatta. Cited locally as a fundamental obstacle to the spread of the Rifai, is the rivalry caused when other centres of religious/social power (resident moulanas) felt that their status was lowered by the arrival of a new and powerfully active Moulana. The Moulanas in New Street and Wellipitiya apparently organized some opposition but the power struggle was short-lived. A challenge was offered to Koya Thangal by way of an invitation to a religious discussion and debate. Not one to mince his words he declared to his protagonist "When you say anything Yes - I will say No. If you say anything No - I will say Yes!" With that all the assembled decided that he must be a highly educated man and they dispersed without further argument. The opposition within Kapuwatta itself was slight but harshly dealt with. There are numerous stories of attempts to cross the Moulana all of which ended in disaster for the ill-wishers (from cats destroying party feasts to a stroke for one man who told the Moulana to shut-up!). (See also Misra et al, for a discussion of the Lakshadweep Thangals expertise in witchcraft 1981:233).



the annual mosque feast, but the very real links between the village and the mosque are much more sharply revealed in the case of a new mosque. The Kapuwatta case is somewhat different from that of Wellipitiya above, where the new mosque was endowed by a single wealthy village benefactor, but the association between the realm of the domestic and that of the village mosque is again signified through the metaphor of food.

#### 6.4 Maduragoda - Mosque Aesthetics and Religious Politics

The members of this out-caste village also chose to build a new Jumma mosque and remove themselves from the arena of the Galbokka/New Street sphere of influence. This event reveals another element in the local discourse on egalitarianism, where villagers chose to both assert their distinct identity and underline their own orthodoxy in a radical mosque structure.

The site of the village immediately across the canal from the New Street area meant that the old Denypitiya Mosque was used for daily prayers, both by the Maduragoda villagers and some of the men from New Street for whom it was closer than the central Jumma Mosque. At that time the mosque and the associated burial grounds were located clearly within the Maduragoda village boundaries, but the new road to Akuressa (circa 1940) cut right through the village, splitting a third of the land area, from the rest of the village. In 1941, a series of disputes arose between the people of Maduragoda and members of the majority Muslim community of Galbokka and New Streets, over the trusteeship and control of the old Denypitiya mosque. After a series of "lockouts", occupations, a robbery and minor brawls, events escalated to the point where a man was stabbed and a number of court cases followed. As a result of this struggle for control, the Waqfs Board confirmed the new Trustees but the Maduragoda people obviously felt at that time that they should establish themselves independently of outside control and chose to build a new village mosque, which was also a Jumma mosque. The space they chose was in the heart of that section of the old village that remained undivided by the new road.<sup>29</sup> No men from the wider community were likely to drop in and offer prayers at this avowedly **Ande** village mosque. The Denypitiya mosque was of course, still available for their use.

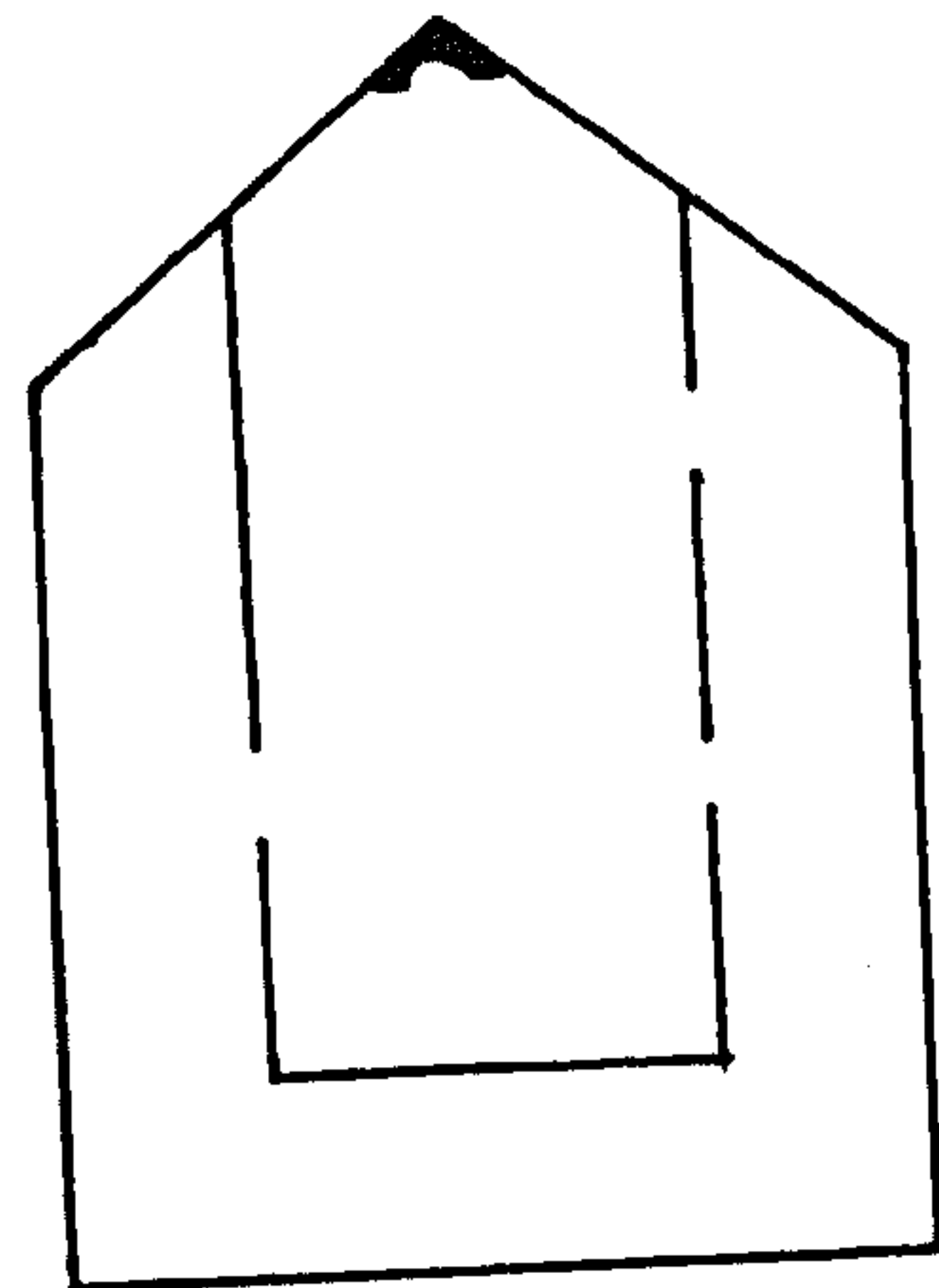
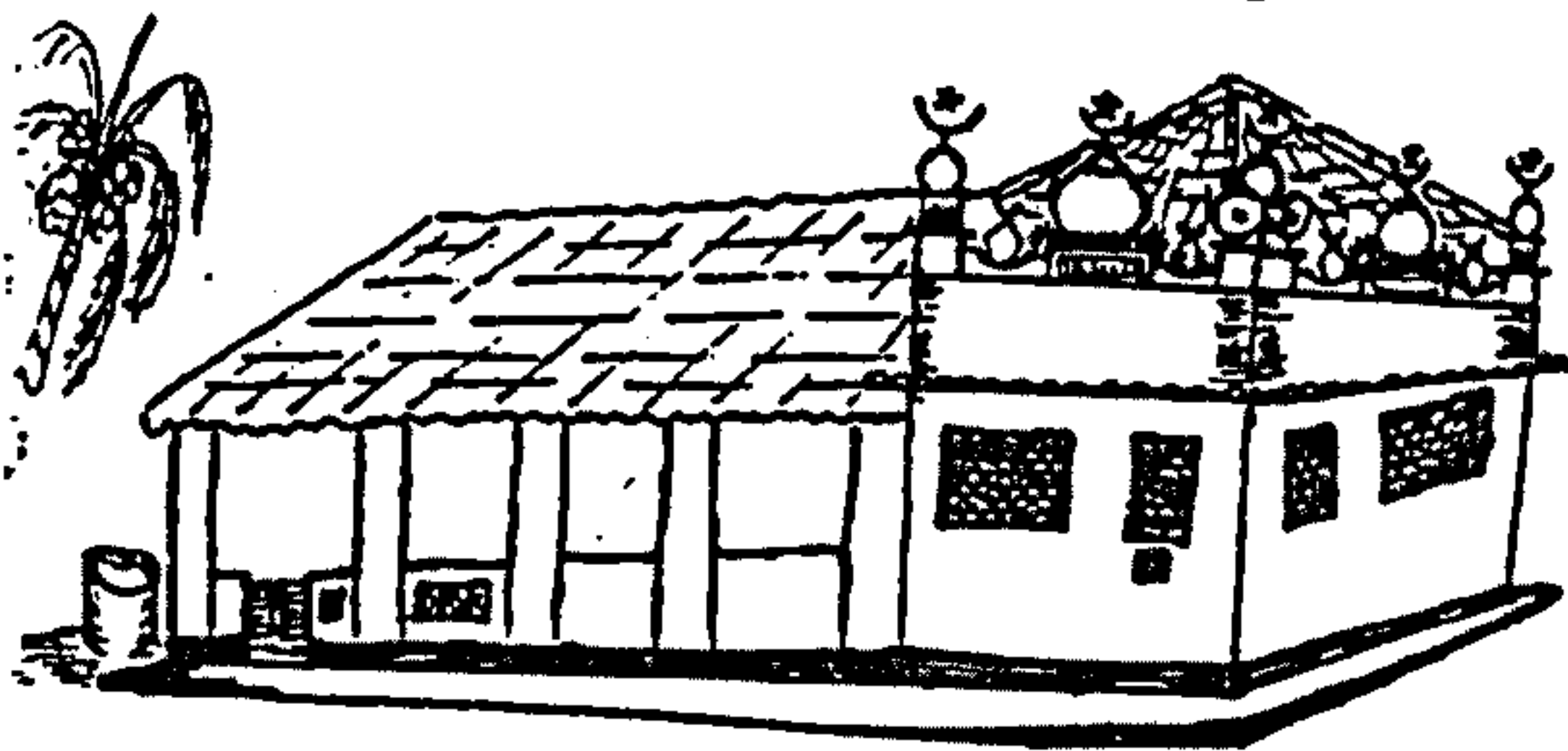
---

<sup>29</sup> The land for the village mosque was donated by the pari-yari.

Further, in choosing to make their new village mosque a Jumma mosque the villagers declared themselves totally self-sufficient and subordinate to no-one.

All the mosques in the area, whether elaborate or simple, large or small, are rectangular buildings with a small niche, **mihrab** which indicates the **qiblah** (direction of Mecca) and the focus of all prayer. In stark contrast the Maduragoda mosque is a five-sided building, in which two entire walls are angled to indicate the qiblah. Alternatively the mihrab, rather than being a niche in one wall, has become the dominating feature of the mosque aesthetic. A solution to an ideological contradiction has here been given permanent architectural form.

**Figure 6 a : The Maduragoda Mosque.**



As out-castes, the Ande suffer continually the contradictions of their egalitarian religion on the one hand, and their utter subordination to the rest of the Muslim community, on the other. Both their creativity and the abject clarity of their ideological statement to the wider Muslim community must be appreciated, in the design of their mosque. Not only do they sign their independence with a separate Jumma mosque, but through the orientation of the **entire mosque towards Mecca**, their own orientation to the religion itself, and its egalitarian ideology, is given added emphasis.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Their commitment to a new orthodoxy may also be observed in the new annual feast, instituted with the new mosque. The feast at Denypitiya was (and still is) focussed upon the Hassan/Hussain mowlood, and is celebrated in Muharram. This feast, in former times also incorporated a procession of wooden structures adorned with lights, which travelled from this mosque to Kaparatota mosque and



The Denypitiya mosque was rebuilt in 1977 immediately opposite the village of Maduragoda. It was a very grand affair and located right on the new road in a very public space. It was built by the same man who built the Wellipitiya mosque above, and he asked the people of Maduragoda if they would sometimes use it for their daily prayers.<sup>31</sup> They replied that "they had their own mosque and that was enough". Their interpretation of his request, was that he wished to place them in allegiance to him. Given their total economic dependence on the wider community, simply for the chance of employment as out-castes; aside from the begging that many of them are forced to resort to, their symbolic assertion of distinct identity, carries within it, the assertion of the desire for economic and social independence.

#### 6.5 Galbokka/New Street - Who Builds the New Mosque?

The capacity of the town's old central Jumma mosque is severely stretched during the Jumma prayers these days. A number of years ago the community began collecting funds in order to replace this mosque with a much bigger one. Building began, and a three story, open-sided, rather flimsy cement structure was erected before funds ran out. What was built is not yet suitable for use so the crowds continue to gather in the old mosque and the shell of the intended new one stands empty next door. Apparently the Waqfs Board stepped in and asked the Wellipitiya benefactor of the two cases above, if he would assist with the completion of the new mosque for the benefit of the entire community. It is said that he agreed to do so but had found that it was not architecturally feasible to continue with the already established structure, and that it would have to be pulled

---

returned. (This in essence traversed the section of the coast than ran along the entire Bay.) The structures were ships, horses, and commonly an elaborate "cage" - a **kudu**, according to those who recall them. This element of the festivities was locally regarded by some as having Hindu overtones and has been dropped within the last twenty-five years. (One informant, an educated Moulavi and also a moulana, who described himself as a 'young Turk' said that he and a friend had made it their business to stamp out the structures. Other informants said that the kudu was only dropped because of the new electric lines which prevented them from carrying these large structures safely on the roads.) The new feast at Maduragoda is held in the month of Rajab, and the **Subharna** mowlood is recited. This is the story of the Prophet himself, the prime exemplar of Islamic life.

<sup>31</sup> He is apparently not regarded as the mosque donor in this instance as he only paid for the "enlargement" of the mosque.

down and an entirely new building designed by an architect built in its place. The community of the mosque however, has rejected this offer of assistance since it would involve the destruction of their efforts to date. In their understandings, the structure that stands, currently unfinished and therefore unused, also stands as a tangible symbol of community co-operation and community intentions to provide themselves with a new house of prayer. To demolish this would be to entirely negate their efforts. A stalemate results.

It is obvious in this situation that contributing to the building of a mosque has a personal significance to those involved. The understanding is that a type of merit accrues on account of deeds such as these. To have the wealthy outsider intrude here would place him in a relation of symbolic dominance over the oldest and perhaps most broadly based section of the Muslim bourgeoisie. This dominance, symbolic or otherwise, they will not permit. Having nothing more than the shell of a mosque but remaining unsubordinated is the better option. They argue that the shell stands as a testament to community effort, thus stressing egalitarian ideals. This is not merely a case of crying false allegiance to an egalitarian ideal in order to remain sovereign; rather, it is critical if they are to maintain relations of equivalence vis-a-vis the Wellipitiya man.

#### **6.6 The Ideology of Egalitarianism.**

Each of the four cases above illustrates certain interpretations of the ideology of egalitarianism as it is employed in practice. In the case of the new mosque at Wellipitiya the communal participation in the rituals which transform the building into a mosque and celebrate its "birth" were discussed. One of the most striking elements of the ritual was the transformation of the mosque building from mundane into sacred space. The very simplicity of the ritual action was a clue to the enormous transformative capacity embodied within the male egalitarian community. As the body of men confronted the three imams within the mosque and prayed across the threshold of the building, so their actions and intentions were witnessed by the male religious community and the transformation of space was effected.

The cases of Kapuwatta and Maduragoda, where each village chose to separate themselves as a community through the building of a new Jumma mosque illustrates clearly the inherent tensions within a community which professes an egalitarian ideology and is constantly



split by class tensions. In both cases this tension was resolved through the construction of a new mosque. The fourth case of the new, but as yet unfinished central Jumma mosque represents a different aspect of this tension and one to which no solution has yet been found. The situation here is more radical than in either of the two village cases discussed above. In each of those cases, a village which became dis-satisfied with the current expression of class tensions and its own position within the larger Jumma community, was able to collaborate as a body and establish a new smaller, but independent Jumma mosque. In Kapuwatta for example they actively asserted a new religious orthodoxy within the area and with their own claims to orthodoxy they were better able to compete in that arena of symbolic power which "legitimizes" economic success. In Maduragoda they made a permanent statement in the aesthetic form of their mosque which they radically oriented towards Mecca. In the case of the central Jumma mosque which is host to the largest Jumma grouping in the area and condenses two village identities within it, a single dominant outsider threatens (in effect) to negate their independence entirely, and provide them with, and thus symbolically dominate them through, a new mosque. An analysis of this "symbolic domination" on the part of an outsider is not my immediate concern, rather I am interested in the contradictions experienced within the community.

These contradictions, which develop between the ideology of egalitarianism and the constant forces of stratification, are experienced by individuals in a very powerful and immediate form. The contradictions arise in the individual's life in the form of personal or family feuds, disputes over the trusteeships or other political disagreements. These newly created social distances may be handled indefinitely in the wider social milieu where parties may cease to contact each other. The situation however becomes problematic within the context of the Jumma mosque. One man I knew in the research area, of otherwise exemplary religious observance had, as the result of a long running family feud, stopped attending the Jumma prayer altogether. He explained that if he prayed behind this other man, with a "heavy heart", then his own prayers would be invalidated. The

intention of the individual is at all times critical within Islamic understandings.<sup>32</sup>

Gilsenan provides a similar example from Lebanon where two families with a history of blood feud, both avoid the Jumma mosque where they "would have to "see" each other and could not "pretend not to notice" (1993;167). The sanctuary of the mosque is not inviolable and the implication is that these families, should they confront each other would be obliged to fight on account of their honour. What is at stake for the individual in each example is somewhat different. In the second case it is the honour, of the man and of his family. In the first it is primarily the invalidation of his prayers and the failure to discharge his fundamental obligations as a Muslim that represents such an incursion into his integrity as an individual. Through the embodiment of the tensions and jealousies, feuds and bitterness, often the product of class friction, individuals when they confront each other at the Jumma prayer, in egalitarian and sacred space, negate each others prayers. The very essence of Islam is an individual surrender to God and individual worship. When individuals begin to experience their own rivalries and jealousies as rendering their worship invalid it is entirely logical that they should seek to remedy this situation through the construction of a separate mosque. Through the establishment of a separate identity and a separate and sacred space they again render their prayers valid and their duty done. I am not seeking to reduce class tensions and sociological phenomena to the level of individual explanations rather I am merely seeking to include individual subjective experience as a critical dimension in this particular argument. An egalitarian ideology is concerned with a world made up of individuals and within its own logic has a tendency to seek explanations at the individual level.

---

<sup>32</sup> The performance of prayers or the completion of the Hajj pilgrimage alone is insufficient, the intention must be correct. Thus I met many young men who while working in the Middle East had completed the Hajj pilgrimage but remained unsure as to whether or not it had been accepted, and their duty to "perform the Hajj pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime" fulfilled.



## Chapter Seven :

### Calendrical Ritual.

The Islamic calendar engages Sri Lankan Muslims in a set of rituals which they perform in conjunction with the rest of the Muslim world. These calendrical religious practices also reveal the articulation of the mosque with the domestic order through communal ritual. An examination of 'the ritual process' of the calendar in the research area, highlights aspects of an ideology of individualism hitherto undiscussed. This chapter outlines these arguments and examines some of the cosmological ideas which underlie them.<sup>1</sup>

#### 7.1 The Calendar.

The calendar is first and foremost ontological. It maps out a complex horizon to Muslim being. The ideology of the Islamic calendar, regardless of the extent to which it is stressed, transformed, or subordinated to particular cultural contexts, which may have calendrical imperatives of their own, remains an undeniable facet of universal Islamic life. Muslims the world over fast during Ramazan and individuals from a multitude of diverse countries make the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The calendar ties the Muslim community together in time and its requisite rituals draw individuals and interpretation from diverse cultures into the world-wide community of believers.

The calendar is by its very nature regenerative. The Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar and is not tied to agricultural seasons, indeed over time it bears no relation to them at all. It is to be expected that where cultures are engaged in agricultural production their relations to both an agricultural calendar and a Muslim calendar would be more complex (see Bourdieu, 1977). Within a community that has no agricultural base however, the regenerative aspects of Islamic calendrical ritual may be sharpened at the ideological level. This I argue is the case in the research area where most Muslims are

---

<sup>1</sup> These ideas are but a small part of wider arguments concerning the cosmological beliefs of Muslims in Sri Lanka and the extent to which they reflect both Islamic ideas and elements of Buddhist and Hindu myths and logics. There are many examples of Muslim myths modelled on earlier Buddhist versions but this analysis lies outside the scope of the thesis.

traders and in this instance it is clearly the Muslim community itself which is regenerated.<sup>2</sup>

The calendar has a complex, lived reality in this cultural context. The local feast calendar is made up of the annual mosque feasts which always start on the 10th of a particular month and which move in a visible cycle throughout the immediate geographical area. Each feast identifies a bounded community and draws crowds from the wider area and engages them in its structure. The feasts move in a regular and pre-ordained progression from one mosque to another, and from one community to another. The full calendrical cycle of feasts, is also, at the same time, a complete re-constitution of all the individual 'village' communities in the research area. The individual Muslim communities stand in relation to each other, not merely as a result of their socio-economic and kinship ties, but because they are bound by the one larger local ritual cycle. The next level of calendrical observance is universal and local Muslims observe the passing monthly rituals (Ashura, Ramazan, the Hajj) along with Muslims all over the world.

Bara'at, the "night of repentance" is one of the minor festivals in the Muslim calendar celebrated locally two weeks before Ramazan. The ritual itself purifies and internally orders the community as a prelude to Ramazan and its passing marks the beginning of a four month period of intense ritual activity which culminates in the Feast of Sacrifice at the end of the Hajj. It is this four month period of the calendrical year which is my focus here. Taken in their entirety these rituals; Bara'at, Ramazan (the month of fasting), Id ul-Fitr (the feast of breaking the fast), the Hajj pilgrimage and Id ul-Azha (the feast of sacrifice), constitute an elaborate ritual complex which is concerned with the annual regeneration of the world-wide Islamic community. Their performance orchestrates a series of progressive transformations in the community. Initially the rituals establish particular local communities as distinct, bounded entities, separate from the 'outside' world and finally they convene the world-wide ummah and eliminate all differentiation within it. This logic of transformation and regeneration moves from the

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a question worthy of further investigation in the Eastern province of the island where the majority of Muslims are farmers.



(re)constitution of small, local communities to the (re)constitution of the worldwide Islamic community that emerges through the annual performance of the Hajj in Mecca.

## 7.2 Bara'at.

Celebrated on the 15th of Shaban, nine months after Ashura - the day of creation, Bara'at is a night which signs a 'rebirth' of the individual Muslim self. Prayers are offered on this night to seek repentance (**tauba** Ar) and Muslims are moved into a state of spiritual purity. Informants understand that individuals are accompanied by two angels, one at each shoulder, who record all good and bad deeds performed. Bara'at is the night when the record of these deeds is removed and each person receives a 'clean slate' for the coming year.<sup>3</sup> Thus all individuals are moved into a state of purity on this night and the community as a whole is purified and oriented anew, towards the tenets of Islam. This orientation and the coming of Ramazan is expressed most clearly when we consider the ideological message that is central to this evening's reflection.

The **Ya Sin Sura** (Sura 36) is recited three times in conjunction with a special plea for forgiveness (**Bara'at du'a**). This particular Sura is rich with added significance when its calendrical context is considered. This Sura acknowledges the Qur'an as a revelation from God, and Muhammad as the last of his prophets sent to admonish mankind. In strong language it relates a parable about "the companions of the city" who failed to heed the messages of a number of previous apostles who had been sent to them with revelations. They had mocked the apostles and threatened to stone them, and were heedless of the fact that the last apostle was now among them and that a day of judgement and accounting was to follow. This Sura is considered by some to be the "heart and essence" of the Qur'an

---

<sup>3</sup> On the eve of the 15th Shaban "religious observances are held in many places in the Islamic world in the belief that destinies for the coming year are fixed that night(...) In Arabic it is called "the **Laylat al Bara'ah** ("the night of forgiveness"). In Iran and India it is called Shab-i-Barat" (Glassé, ibid:243). Local informants reported that this is the night on which God "shakes the tree of life". Those whose names are on the leaves that fall will die in the coming year.

(Thawfeeq, ibid:57).<sup>4</sup> There is clear reference within the Sura to the coming of Ramazan - a month which is sacred because it contains the "Night of Power" (*Laylat al-Qadr* A) - the "night of revelation" in which the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad. In reflecting upon this ideological statement at the heart of the evening's prayers the community establishes itself as cognizant of the wealth of its traditions and full of intention to heed the Qur'an.<sup>5</sup> In short, it establishes a community which will re-enact/reproduce its receipt of the divine revelation, its mythology, its history and its religious and social code of practice.

Bara'at signs the impending arrival of Ramazan and its passing quickens the pulse of the community whose preparations for the month of fasting now begin in earnest. On this day the women of every Muslim household spend part of the day making large quantities of rotti (bread) on the domestic hearth. This task falls to those married women in the house, generally a mother and married daughters though sometimes female relatives from other houses will combine with them and make a day of it. In the late afternoon these rotti, together with quantities of bananas are sent to the mosques, with the young men of the household.<sup>6</sup> That evening enormous crowds of men and

---

<sup>4</sup> This consideration is completely consistent with an ideological position of a peripheral Islamic community whose boundaries are perceived as constantly running the risk of being breached by outside forces. The Muslims must continually act to make their world conform to their theory, and central to their action is the reproduction of Islamic ideology.

<sup>5</sup> Ramazan is the holiest month of the year in that it contains both the "Night of Power" in which the gift of the Qur'an was first revealed and also the Tharaviah prayers. Tharaviah (for the mere asking) are special prayers for each night of Ramazan, each of which has specific boons attached. For example if a Muslim completes the Tharaviah prayers on the first night he "accrues the benefits of Allah's forgiveness for all his past sins and will be made the like of an innocent baby born that day" (Irshard:1969:11-12). If he completes the prayers of the 29th night this "makes him the equal of those who have fulfilled a thousand acceptable Hajj pilgrimages" (ibid, op cit). In total they provide all the gifts of complete forgiveness and spiritual rebirth, plus the religious knowledge and sanctity of former saints and prophets. These gifts are attainable by every individual in the religious community.

<sup>6</sup> Most women sent offerings to several of the nearby mosques but at least one woman sent them to all the mosques in the area. The latter woman was from a housing estate and lived alone with her eight children while her husband worked in a nearby town as a 'penciller' for a local 'bookie'. As gambling is prohibited in Islam (though by no means uncommon), he is engaged in a dangerous



boys gather in all the mosques for the sunset prayer (*Maghrib*) and a communal recital of Ya Sin Sura from the Qur'an. Simultaneously the women gather in kin groups in their homes and recite the same prayers. At the close of prayers in each mosque the imam distributes the rotti and bananas to all those present and they take the food home to their families.<sup>7</sup>

This simple and eloquent rite hides a wealth of significance in its central elements of communal prayer and the sharing of food. Initially the most striking feature is the sheer scope of community involvement in this particular event.<sup>8</sup> Every individual, every household and all mosques are engaged in the single purpose of binding the community together.<sup>9</sup> There is no other occasion in the

---

occupation and it is possible that all precautions must be taken.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the rotti they sent to the mosques, many women had other projects in hand this day and an examination of these wider practices of rotti distribution revealed other kinship and community ties which were called into significance on this occasion. Some of the women made up food parcels (including rock salt, eggs, rice and biscuits) which they distributed with rotti and bananas directly to poorer families in their area. This was understood as linked to the practice of alms-giving (*zakat*) during Ramazan where providing food in order that others may be able to fast is recommended. These parcels are met with a return gift of lime and turmeric and/or betel leaves. Some women sent parcels of rotti and food to the homes of their relatives. The women of one of the Moulana families made small rotti which they distributed with half bananas and lollies to the children in their neighbourhood thus signing their direct obligation to nurture the children of the community. At least one of the mosques sent rotti to the homes of all the Moulanas in the town thus indicating that the Prophet's family should be supported by the religious community.

<sup>8</sup> I rode past almost every mosque in the area this evening and indeed they were all crowded.

<sup>9</sup> A second factor was its 'taken-for granted' nature. I had neither heard of, nor read about Bara'at and in my ignorance had been asking people questions about Ramazan and the impending fast. On the morning of Bara'at two young men informed me that the women in their houses were "making rotti to send to the mosque". This was not a big ritual according to them and they hadn't thought to mention it but "all the women would make rotti" and "everyone would pray this night" (my emphasis). Bara'at is conspicuous by its absence in the ethnographic literature. Mines notes that *shab-e-barat* is a "kind of All Souls day" observed as a community ritual in Northern Tamil Nadu (1975:407). Gaborieau notes that it is a ritual "for the village dead" (1984:247). Although located in the Indian region (Tamil Nadu & Nepal) note the contrast with the Sri Lankan ritual which is oriented to the living community. Von Grunbaum in his book *Muhammadan Festivals* (1988) does not mention the ritual at all.

ritual calendar which commands this level of participation or in which the idea of "the community at prayer" has such an extensive reality.

Through their action of sending rotti to the mosques the women sign themselves as nurturing and feeding the community and potentially empowering the mosque to overcome the differentiation within it. The community is differentiated into numerous distinct households each of which is constructed around a woman. Matrilocal residence ensures that women constitute the household in a very strong sense. In a context where marriages often force a man to change both his village and his mosque, women are clearly a potentially divisive force in the Islamic community of men centred on the village mosque. When the women send rotti to the mosques at Bara'at it is this potentially differentiating force that they culturally embody, that they offer to the mosques. Through this act the mosques are empowered to reconstitute and nurture the undifferentiated egalitarian community, the ummah. Significantly, the nurturing on this particular occasion is not dependent upon particular kinship relation, the food is provided by **all women** through the agency of the mosque, to the ummah. In this instance it is clear that although women are generally excluded from the mosque they are not without relation to it. In this ritual they are recognized as the base of the community and its reproductive force. Their fertility is problematic however in that it continually threatens to divide the community. In the ritual redistribution of the rotti by the imam the women's gift of fertility is transformed into an act of nurture and incorporation by the mosque. In the act of nurturing and feeding the ummah the women offer their fertility to the mosque. It is this act which permits the subsequent transformative and incorporative action through the mosque.

Bara'at reconstitutes the community, it is at this point each year that the ummah achieves a ritual significance. It must be interpreted as a clear prelude to the month of Ramazan when the community as a whole will endure the rigours of fasting. Its passing marks a clear shift in the calendar, a time when the focus of religious and communal life is oriented towards the domestic sphere. In the two weeks remaining until Ramazan the women of all households undertake to clean them thoroughly. This cleaning is understood as a metaphor for the spiritual cleaning of the self and is explicitly stated as



such by informants who state, "it is pointless to clean your house unless your heart is also pure".

The ritual also inscribes however **the symbolic order** of relations within the community; it bounds the ummah and stresses the ties within it. During the evening when the men are in the mosques and the women are gathered in kin groups in their households for the prayers then it can be seen that the whole village is incorporated in an act of prayer and **village becomes equivalent to mosque** on this occasion. Males and females are expressly forbidden from praying together in this Islamic context. In everyday practice men pray together in the mosque and women pray individually within the home. Prayer is an act which defines as separate; men and women, and male and female space. The point of unification is the Ka'bah in Mecca towards which all Muslims are physically oriented when they pray.<sup>10</sup> The ummah is further demonstrated as dependent upon and emergent from the mundane community of kin groups and on this occasion, as completely co-extensive with it. The structure of the community is outlined; the relations between household and mosque, between mosque and household, the correct relations between men and women, and **their particular and separate** relations to the mosque and public religious activity.

Bara'at is concerned with defining and bounding, feeding and nurturing, reconstituting and re-orienting the community in preparation for the month long ritual fast of Ramazan. Within its ritual structure the entire mode of practice ideal to the ummah is elaborated. Bara'at itself is the first stage of a ritual complex which in its entirety condenses a view of Islamic cosmology.

### 7.3 The Calendrical Complex : Bara'at to the Hajj.

I will present a brief description of the rituals which make up this complex in order to demonstrate the transformations and movements of successive incorporation that are achieved within the ummah. This

---

<sup>10</sup> The Ka'bah (lit, "cube") stands in the centre of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. It is also known as the " 'holy house' (al-bayt al-haram) and the 'Ancient house' (al-bayt al-'atiq)" (Glassé, ibid:214). It is worth noting that at this focal point of all Muslim prayer, house and mosque are conjoined and that the house (Ka'bah) is encompassed by the mosque.

movement is in accordance with an egalitarian logic that progressively eliminates differentiation within the community.<sup>11</sup>

As outlined above, during Bara'at all individuals are purified and given a clean slate. Further, house-mosque relations are established, the local ummah is bounded and constituted, and the ideology of its correct internal ordering is clearly defined. Two weeks after Bara'at the month of **Ramazan** begins and all Muslims must fast (**nombu**) between the hours of dawn and dusk. Endurance of the month of fasting strengthens the community and its faith.<sup>12</sup>

**Ramazan** is a liminal period when taken for granted religious and social life takes on a different ambience. The pace of life changes dramatically for most people. Because the first meal of the day (Suhar) must be completed by approximately 4.20am, the women are often up to cook around 2am.<sup>13</sup> This is the time of annual leave for Muslim schools and many workers take their holidays at this time. The houses are thus filled with family members. During the day the houses tend to be quiet with people sleeping and reading the Qur'an and there is an air of relaxation not normally present.<sup>14</sup> At night,

---

<sup>11</sup> I have restricted my concern to a brief discussion of the transformations within the ummah and the logic of its reproduction. The central question for future analysis concerns **the egalitarian possibility of Islam** encoded in its calendrical ritual practice. This and other related questions call for a far more detailed and symbolic analysis than I am able to attempt here.

<sup>12</sup> Fasting involves not eating or drinking anything at all, even swallowing saliva is forbidden. In line with regional cultural understandings fasting is believed to 'heat' the body. A particular drink *kasha-kasha* is taken in the evenings to cool the body down.

<sup>13</sup> Most households have a printed Ramazan calendar published by one of the local business houses which indicate the fasting times for each day of the month. (There is always an extra week of times provided for the benefit of women who may not fast while menstruating.) The times are also announced on the radio. In many years one or other of the Bawas from Eravur (see Ch 4) may be performing the duty of walking through the streets calling people to wake up for Suhar before the fast. They then spend the days "busking" at houses during the day and collecting alms. Ramazan is an extremely lucrative time for them and they spread all over the island for it.

<sup>14</sup> Everyone is urged to spend part of the day in private reading of the Qur'an and ideally one should complete a reading of the entire book in the month. All of the women I observed complied with this and many of the men. There are also organized readings after the Tharaviah prayers held each night and many of the younger men contented themselves with performing their reading as part of this public recital in thirty parts.



by contrast, the pace is unusually festive. For the entire month there is a complete 'street scene' which lasts well into the night, and which is centered on the street of the central Jumma mosque. It is common for the younger men to spend the whole night up socializing and eating with friends and to retire to bed after the morning prayers. The streets are crowded with men after the Tharaviah prayers and communal Qur'an recitals. The shops are open very late and while some of the older youth set up stalls to sell sherbert or the traditional *cungee*,<sup>15</sup> many a budding entrepreneur has cut his teeth selling fruit or sweets, from a bowl outside his house or in the streets, during Ramazan. On the last day of the month people look for the new moon of Sharwaal which has to be sighted with the naked eye. The day following is **Id al Fitr** - the Feast of Breaking the Fast. This is celebrated locally by kindred groups following morning communal prayers in the mosque.<sup>16</sup> New clothes are worn and families enjoy a day of feasting and visiting relatives.<sup>17</sup>

The Hajj pilgrimage takes place shortly after the end of Ramazan and although very few local people have the means to attend, the structure of events is followed and the feast at the end of the Hajj is celebrated both locally and in Mecca. The Hajj is a ten day pilgrimage undertaken in a ritual space in which all pilgrims assume the *ihram* (pilgrim dress) and maintain a state of ritual purity for its duration. Pilgrims repeat events from a pre-Islamic past (Hagar's search for water between the hills of Safa and Marwa, the stoning of the Great Devil) and they circumambulate the Ka'bah. They participate in a set of ritual practices which are outside mundane time, which unite them in a common interpretation of religious history, and further unite them across time with the exemplars of a Muslim past. In one sense the ritual can be argued to be against time - it creates

---

<sup>15</sup> Cungee is a porridge made from rice and meat and it is taken soon after the fast is ritually broken with three dates and water, in the manner of the Prophet. This appears to be a following of a Meccan custom of a wheat and meat soup taken during Ramazan (Glassé, *ibid*:231).

<sup>16</sup> In Colombo this is the occasion of a large public celebration on Galle Face Green.

<sup>17</sup> The new clothes make it effectively the Muslim 'New Year' in this cultural context.

a collectivity, (the ummah) through a denial of the different histories and cultures, in which pilgrims are embedded, and allows them to experience a common Muslim past.

The Hajj takes place in Mecca which is a city barred to non-Muslims. All Muslim pilgrims have similar identities and are no longer divided by their distinct cultures and languages. They become an integral part of the world-wide community of Islam. The Hajj is a ritual which eliminates both cultural and gender difference. In radical contrast to the practice in other mosques, here men and women may participate in the ritual and offer their prayers together. Here at the heart of the Muslim world, in a mosque that contains the Ka'bah (the first house and the first mosque) male and female may pray together - because in this space their individuality is sacrosanct.

For the duration of the pilgrimage one's hair or nails must not be cut, lice or any other creatures must not be killed and sexual relations are expressly forbidden and render the pilgrimage null and void (Von Grun ebaum, ibid:27). There is a strict concern with the maintenance of bodily boundaries and a state of ritual purity. These practices may be seen as establishing and preserving **individual purity**. It is perhaps surprising then that a practice which is held in abeyance is the requirement that menstruating women refrain from prayers (or touching the Qur'an) because they are in a state of impurity. Women may menstruate on the Hajj. Here at the centre of Islam their femininity is unproblematic.<sup>18</sup> They are no longer defined by their femininity and at this point gender may be argued to no longer be a differentiating factor. In the context of the Hajj all forms of differentiation are eliminated. The ummah of the Hajj is truly egalitarian - this is the ideological epitome of individualism.

The Hajj ends with a sacrifice - **Id al Azha** (the Feast of Sacrifice). The sacrifices in Mecca are mirrored by village sacrifice, though on a much smaller scale.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> This only applies to the space of the ritual itself of course. Women are not expected to make the pilgrimage without suitable male company.

<sup>19</sup> These days in Mecca so many animals are sacrificed that meat is flown to nearby countries and distributed to the poor as alms. In the research area there were generally three or four people that each sacrificed a bull and distributed a proportion of the meat.



This ritual complex begins with the women's gift of rotti and bananas to the mosque and the prayers of Bara'at. It closes with the animal sacrifice of men at the end of the Hajj. Bara'at is clearly a transcendent point in the calendar, one which witnesses the annual re-birth of the purified and internally ordered Muslim community. During Ramazan the ummah is fortified by the fast and all individuals have the opportunity to achieve absolute purification and religious knowledge through the Tharaviah prayers. In the final month of the Muslim year, during the Hajj the ummah is redeemed through completion of the pilgrimage and the sealing of a contract with God with blood sacrifice. This period of the year is critical. All Five Pillars of Islam are foregrounded and part of religious practice. It is a pre-ordained period of reflection and renewal.

The regeneration of the ummah, which is also its reproduction, essays a logic of egalitarianism. An egalitarianism in which individual identity is continually transformed. Identity can be seen to be unequivocally constructed through the calendrical rituals. Thus the practice of the Islamic ritual calendar actually substantiates Muslim individuality; giving it greater and greater substance and definition throughout the year, to its highest point which is experienced during the Hajj in Mecca. The highest point of individuality is located within Islam's greatest ritual of community. This is a ritual point at which all difference has been progressively excised, all outsiders are excluded, and the collectivity united at the centre of the Muslim world.

Within this Islamic egalitarian logic male and female stand as ontologically distinct; as embodiments of complementary and opposing principles which together form a potentially reproductive unity. In Sri Lanka where much of the religious ritual practice is concerned with the reconstitution and reproduction of the community, women - as the embodiment of fertility - are seen as vital to the religious process.

This contrasts with the presentation of women in Islam as somewhat peripheral to mosque based religious practice, notwithstanding a constant concern with their virtue and fertility. My interest here is to clearly link the ritual activity of women with the nurturing power of the mosque. There is, in other words, a dimension of mosque based religious practice that engages the power of women despite their exclusion from the domain of the mosque itself.

#### 7.4 Gender and Cosmology.

Cosmologies present comprehensive arguments concerning the structure of and orientation to the wider cultural world in which people live. Fundamental questions addressed by cosmologies are those of fertility and reproduction, and conceptions of gender are often a critical aspect of those arguments. There are many different ways of approaching the question of gender. Here I look at the question of gender through an examination of an Islamic cosmology as revealed in ritual and calendrical practice amongst Sri Lankan Muslims.

My first concern is the symbolic structure of male-female relations. The constant association of women with **valakkam** - indigenous custom, renders them always both natives and converts and one step removed from pure Islamic origins. This stands in contrast to men who are conceived to be foreign and Islamic, associated with **din** - religion, and as continually constructing an Islamic context. These contrasting ideological conceptions of men and women remain a permanent point of tension in the system and the cultural power of women must continually be subordinated to an Islamic ideology. This would at first sight tend to support the general view of Islam that portrays women as external to and excluded from, "orthodox" religious practice. My research leads me to suggest an alternative interpretation however. In the continual reproduction of the Islamic community in the Islamic universe, women are absolutely fundamental. Not through a continual subordination of culture to religion or nature to culture but through an ontologically inscribed unity between men and women that exists at the heart of the Islamic cosmology itself.

In the context of the calendrical cycle the entire Muslim community may be observed undergoing transformation and regeneration. The very first point of that ritual cycle however was the act of women sending rotti to the mosque and this should now be re-examined.<sup>20</sup> Given the

---

<sup>20</sup> I note here that rotti are not used in any ritual religious sense by the Sinhalese Buddhist or Tamil Hindu communities and I believe it necessary to look to a wider Islamic world for the significance of bread as a communal food. In the Northern Sudan for example as Boddy (1982, 693) illustrates, the flour and water product kisra; a staple food which sustains life is understood as a symbol of fertility and of the product of male and female labour. Dates are another food which has no local cultural significance but is used symbolically by Muslims. Muslim shops stock them only during Ramazan and people use them to break their fast as the Prophet did.



cosmology as outlined we see that the offerings at the beginning, by women, in an ordered Islamic community are the initial, symbolic act in a complex ritual logic. The entire process of successive transformations within the ummah, newly reconstituted, begins with the gift of female fertility to the mosque, symbolized by the offerings of rotti.

Partaking of food from the mosque is a regular and significant event in the Muslim household and the sharing of food symbolizes the ties within the Islamic community. Mowloods and feasts are regularly held at all the local mosques but Bara'at is markedly different in both the type of food and the manner of its distribution. For the duration of the Mowlood recitals and on the occasions of the mosque feasts the village supports the mosque which then nurtures them. Although women may participate peripherally on these occasions, either scraping coconuts at home or peeling vegetables to redeem a vow in the grounds of the mosque, this is not common, and most importantly they have no connection with the cooking. The ghee rice is prepared on male hearths on domestic lands or in the grounds of the mosque. On none of these occasions are the domestic hearths involved in the provision of food and the understanding is that it is the mosque which is nurturing the community in all the above cases. The ritual food associated with Bara'at however differs radically from the mosque feast in that it is prepared by women on the domestic hearth, and it is later consumed in the house by the family. The preparation of food by the women in the religious context here is rich with significance and is the only occasion of the ritual year in which they are clearly associated with mosque food. Further it is family groups who consume the food, rather than an Islamic community of men. Ideologically the distinction is drawn between the Islamic and egalitarian brotherhood of the mosque feast and the matrilineal family groups of Bara'at which are the reproductive centres of a newly purified and reconstituted Islamic community.

The fact that on this occasion the women prepare the food on the domestic hearths, and gift it personally to the mosques marks the event as highly significant. The symbolic nurturing of the community that is signed in this ritual feeding is far more extensive at Bara'at and this is in line with its calendrical context as a "re-birth" of the ummah prior to the events of Ramazan and the Hajj. On this occasion it is first the community, through the domestic hearths of the women who are constitutive of the power of the

mosques, then the mosques in turn which are constitutive of the ummah. Women as custodians of the domestic hearths offer this communal gift of life to the mosques, but in a more particular sense I argue that they offer their own embodied power of fertility. At this particular moment women stand as metaphors or symbols of the myriad families and households which will come to reconstitute the ummah.

It is the women who feed and nurture the community on a day to day basis through their cooking on the domestic hearth. The domestic hearth constitutes the household and may itself be seen as a symbol of the household which eats from it. In this cultural environment women own the houses and symbolically may be recognized AS the house. Where several sisters with their husbands and children share a house the house is differentiated into various families; each identified with one woman and one hearth. In a very real sense women are the fertile centre of the family and the household. When women send rotti to the mosques they do so on behalf of their husbands and all their children; they incorporate the family within themselves through this act. The Bara'at ritual is more than simply a conjunction of the private and public spheres of Islamic life. At this point women are metaphors for the house and the domestic sphere, not the domestic per se.<sup>21</sup> The fertility gifted to the mosque is always an active fertility; it signs a reproductive capacity and the women who provide rotti are always married women. Fertility by definition deals with the unification of male and female principles. Therefore it is appropriate that it is stressed at those moments in the community's life when it celebrates "birth" or "calendrical regeneration"; the rebirth of the ummah at Bara'at, the birth of a new mosque, the conferral of a new Islamic status on an individual through the naming of a new baby.

To briefly summarize my position - I have outlined a view of the cosmology which is driven by a regenerative and calendrical logic. This logic is seen most explicitly when we trace the transformations effected in the ummah through the process of calendrical ritual. Each of these transformations is in accordance with a logic of egalitarianism and abolition of differentiation. Ultimately they create the ummah of the hajj; the ummah at its highest manifestation.

---

<sup>21</sup> A similar point has been made about Sinhalese women (Kapferer, 1983).



This ritual process is first set in motion with the advent of the Bara'at ritual and a central symbolic element of this is the feeding of the community by the women. When the complex as a whole is examined it can be seen that the opening and closing rites of the complex indicate a shift from the bread provided by women to the meat sacrificed by men. Both elements are critical for the continual nurturing of the ummah; men and women combine to generate its reproductive force. Male and female constitute a unity in Islam at the cosmological level and their separation and conjunction at various points in the social world must be interpreted with this in mind. Male and female are icons in this Islamic understanding and their unity is the sacred and regenerative heart of the cosmology itself.

The structure of Islamic cosmology has not been of analytical interest in most <sup>ethnographic</sup> studies of Muslim communities. Caught within a theoretical bind that defines Islamic religious practice as dichotomised into either "orthodox" or "folk", scholars have fallen prey to two traps. First there has been the tendency to take as unproblematic the idea of a universal Islamic ideology; "a unified religious tradition" (El Zein, 1977), neither demanding analysis nor worthy of investigation. Secondly, and as a result of this, "folk" or popular studies, where they have been pursued, are explored as deviations from universal norms (a point made by Tapper & Tapper, 1987). The result has been an overt lack of interest in the cosmological understandings of Muslims in varied cultural contexts and <sup>few ethnographic</sup> explorations of calendrical ritual. In those studies where an interest in the cosmology has been pursued the concern has been narrowly focused upon the interaction of the "demonic" with the human population in possession cases, in contrast to an attempt to understand the cosmology as a whole. These studies are limited in number and few offer any detailed information on the cosmology. The cosmos is often presented simply as a realm, which humans share with angels, jinn, shaitans and other lower order spirits. Representations of the cosmology are remarkably similar across widely variant cultural contexts and when differences are noted to occur this is generally, as one would expect, in the lower "demonic" orders, which it is argued, more readily reflect the varied cultural grounds where Islam has taken root.

The cosmological world of Muslims in Sri Lanka is inhabited with a veritable array of spirits, some of whom they share with the other

religions, indicating a clearly dialectical relation between religious understandings on this small island. As with Muslims elsewhere they believe themselves to be individually accompanied at all times by two angels and constantly running the risk of encountering myriads of other spirits. These range from the merely disconcerting ghosts of suicides which hover around streams and crossroads at night, jinn and shaitans - Islamic minor demons, to a selection of self reproducing Arabic demons of awful power and purpose who may interfere with male and female fertility, Mohini Pishashi who is a female version of Vishnu, and Huniyam (the Sinhalese Suniyam) who causes the evil eye. Precautions are regularly taken against any interference by these spirits, especially for women and children who are seen as more vulnerable, but men regularly report seeing ghosts at night and I have had several accounts of individual men who have encountered some of the more powerful demons.

Crapanzano (1973) in his study of the Hamadsha takes account of the force of the cosmology in everyday life since it is for illnesses caused by the jinn that the Hamadsha are called (ibid:135). The Moroccan world is full of spirits with whom Moroccans habitually share their existence and occasionally they possess individuals. Crapanzano's concern is to reduce this phenomenon to an expression of psychological catharsis for young men in a position of submission to male parental authority so his analysis reveals nothing of cosmological structure. A far better and more recent article by Boddy (1988) on her study of the phenomenon of Zar possession in the Sudan also outlines a cosmological world and in particular she explores the structure of the relations between the Zar and the humans they possess. Boddy does at least turn her analysis towards discovering the cultural meanings of these relations between the Zar and humans but the possession phenomenon doesn't fall within specifically religious ritual or throw any light on a particularly Islamic view of cosmology. However, beyond these two studies concerned with the nature of some of the spirits engaged in human possession there appears to be no further interest in the question of cosmology at all.

If the cosmology is represented as having a structure or a logic at all it is no more than that of a unilineal movement from base to apex through spiritual levels of development. Thus Crapanzano notes that jinn are believed to be capable of salvation (ibid:134) and more



generally there is an Islamic conception of a possible human progression through hierarchical levels of religious understanding from shariat; following the laws of Islam, tariqa; following a particular sufistic path, to hakkia; the way of the heart when one has internalised the inner truths of the Koran, and marifat, the loss of self in God.

I am adding to current debates on Islamic cosmology and my particular focus is calendrical ritual. I wish to explore the constant regeneration of the ummah through the process of calendrical ritual.

A further consequence of the "orthodox"/"folk" dichotomy has been the overt linkage of women with folk religion and a tendency to negate entirely their engagement in the realm of religious practice. Tapper and Tapper in a recent article on Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam (1987) take up the question of women's religious practice and declare that

an intrinsic relation between gender and religious orthodoxy is a characteristic of practiced Islam everywhere, and that elucidation of this relation must be central to any anthropology of Islam (ibid:69).

They argue that discussions of Islam have been too long hampered by the tendency to see everything in terms of dichotomies; universal/particular, urban/rural, public/private, male/female, intellectual/emotional, orthodox/popular. This has led to "a tyranny of orthodoxy" (ibid:70) where men's religious activities have been examined in terms of their degree of orthodoxy and where religious activities of women have been "dismissed as *a priori* peripheral to those of men" (ibid:69). This approach they argue, ignores the possibility that

different aspects of the religious system may be the province of one sex or the other, and an understanding of any particular Islamic tradition depends on examining both (ibid:70).

They find that in Turkey where the state has

limited men's public religious activities, the central mystery of salvation is celebrated particularly in the women's mevluds (ibid;69).

Unstated but implied is that this has been in part a reflection of historical circumstances - where the state's oppression of overt "orthodox", male religious practice has been met by a corresponding shift within the community, in which the religious practices of women have increased in popularity and achieved new significance. Historical contingencies aside however, they argue that women's religious practices and performances may carry a

religious load (...) of greater transcendental importance to the community than that borne by men (ibid:72).

They conclude that without attention to the religious practices of men and women, and the relations between them, it is not possible to gain an understanding of Islam in any particular culture, let alone attempt cultural comparison.

Initially I was excited by their call for the examination of the intrinsic relation between gender and religious orthodoxy but I feel that their argument ultimately falls into the same dichotomy that they would seek to overcome. They accept without sufficient examination the separation of male and female worship. They perceive no essential unity decreed in cosmological understandings. A cosmological unity which is evident at the most fundamental level in the unity of orientation of prayers to Mecca. Men and women offer their prayers in their separate contexts, house and mosque, but they achieve a unity in their focus on the Ka'bah; Islam's prime icon, and itself understood as a condensation of house and mosque. The ambits of men and women are separated within much Islamic practice and this is significant in understanding male and female experience - but their unity is ontologically given and equally critical in any analysis. This apparently universal separation of men and women in Islam which leads to the perennial dichotomy in analysis, is a reflection of a deeper cosmological understanding. Central to Islamic cosmology is an idea of fertility and reproduction. This I argue, is a fundamental cosmological principle that is generally overlooked. Tapper and Tapper propose to examine the relation between gender and religious orthodoxy. They

insist that an intrinsic relation between gender and religious orthodoxy is a characteristic of practised Islam everywhere, and that the elucidation of this relation must be central to any anthropology of Islam (ibid:88).

It emerges in the analysis however, that the concept of gender is problematic. They constantly refer to gender defined ambits and practices (the sexual division of religious labour), not cultural conceptions of gender as ontologically given. Through this limitation in their analysis, where they do not explore the meaning of gender, they are led to deal always with the separate religious practices of men and women, and never their unity. Therefore they reproduce the public/private, male/female, dichotomy. The social and religious separation of men and women in Islam is a function of a cosmological



understanding which sees them as unified in reproductive and regenerative practice.

It is this continual presentation of an apparent dichotomy that my own analysis is directed towards overcoming. The ritual of Bara'at, in the Sri Lankan Islamic calendrical context is clearly a ritual which conjoins 'orthodox' (male/mosque/public) and 'popular' (female/domestic/private) practices. It would be possible to argue that in terms of the ritual action, the 'popular' practices both precede and follow the 'orthodox' practices and simultaneously mirror them within the domestic sphere, outside direct mosque control. The movement of the evening is house-mosque-house. But this illuminates a significant point which is - that the intention of those in the 'domestic' sphere is to express what they understand very clearly as a relation to the mosque and so-called 'orthodox' practices.<sup>22</sup> There is no separation at the analytical level - they are completely inter-twined. There is a separation in Islam, expressed in terms of gender, but this is located within a grand cosmic schema which has a male and female unity at the heart of its regenerative movement.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Orthodox' is invariably a locally defined term, as well as an analyst's conceptual bias.

<sup>23</sup>It is not sufficient to argue merely that women are excluded/secluded from social life, though there is no doubt that Muslim women are oppressed both socially and politically in most countries. In the ideology of Islam men and women are argued to have separate and complementary roles ('they are like each others clothing' was the most common local phrase) and this is often used to justify their unequal treatment. I take heed of Jeffrey's (1979:22) criticism that to dress the situation up as 'functional interdependence' (different but equal) is no justification for purdah at the political level.

There is no denial on my part of the obvious oppression and exclusion of Muslim women but I also call for no denial on the part of the analyst of the fundamental cosmological systems upon which many of these ideologies of gender are based and from which they derive great power. Much of the discussion of Muslim women has tended to focus on the effect of the ideology of gender on the **status** of women (Beck & Keddie, 1978, see Ortner & Whitehead 1981, on women in general). As a result analysts have failed to fully appreciate the nature of the female oppression they so wish to document. They have also failed to discern the reflection in different cultural contexts, of the male and female unity inscribed at the heart of Islam. The cosmology must be addressed if one is to talk at all of the symbolic universe of Muslims and the basis for their separation by gender.

This unity has long been extant in the work of the Muslims themselves, but is for no apparent reason ignored by the analysts.

To speak of creation or manifestation is to speak of polarization, of the manifold, of multiplicity whose first stage is that primordial polarization between the two contending and complementary principles, which are seen throughout cosmic manifestation and which in human life appear as the male and female sexes. In relation to the Divine Unity all multiplicity is a veil... (Nasr,1980:67).

In the last few chapters I have elaborated the position of women in relation to locally defined orthodox Islam. Women are consistently regarded as less pure than men and more closely linked to culture. But male and female unity is proscribed and recognised. In this cultural context men are agents of religion but it is women who are ultimately agents of community; the fertile ground upon which the ummah must rest.



## Chapter Eight:

### Marriage as a 'Rite of Conversion'.

The Muslim marriage ritual establishes a union which guarantees reproductive continuity and it also asserts symbolically the key dimensions of social reality which Muslims understand themselves to live. Every marriage is a reflection of the original creation of the Moor community when 'Arab traders converted and married local women'. Through the ritual itself which creates an original Muslim family, male and female are metaphors of a wider social process in which religion (*din*) and culture (*valakkam*) are brought together in dramatic and determinative relation.

The wedding is a rite of particular interest for it clearly outlines the joining together of two families in relationships which are often entirely new, and specifically brings two individuals into lifelong sexual relation. It is the beginning of a potential new family unit with children of its own; this being both a continuation of family networks and a change in social and political relations. In its process is a statement on the nature of the symbolic world in which the marriage takes place. A 'situational analysis' of the rite with its interplay of cultural and religious elements will reveal the symbolic world of the Muslims as they themselves see it.

In this chapter I take the ritual and re-explore dimensions of the encompassing social and political world which is symbolically represented in the rite. There are two levels of meaning to be drawn from the following description and analysis of the Muslim wedding. The first concerns the wedding as a social, cultural and symbolic event. At this level the wedding is an event which illuminates cultural and religious ideas through symbols of fertility, reproduction and nurture and actions which signify the creation of new kin relations. The second level of interpretation concerns the rites as ideological statements about the correct internal ordering of the Muslim community. Religion stands in hierarchical and encompassing relation to culture. The marriage rite clearly essays the subordination of the cultural realm to that of the religious. It is in this sense and as a metaphor of the origin of the community that I argue that marriage should be read as a 'rite of conversion'.

### 8.1 The Muslim House.

The Muslim house is the hearth of the Muslim family and the primary domain of all Muslim women. Most of the women observe *purdah* and although there are occasions when the women are seen on the streets, they are always *en route* and have no place in the public arena.<sup>1</sup> Muslim women have a type of "invisibility" in the public domain (Gilsenan, 1993:169). For most women in this area the house is their sole locus and house spaces in a sense constitute the 'world of women'. It is here that children are nurtured and acquire their 'taken for granted' world of cultural and religious beliefs and practices. The house is the site of all life-cycle rituals (birth, male circumcision, marriage, death) and also the location of religious performances of *mowloods* and the fasting during Ramadan. The house pulls together the worlds of religion (*din*) and culture (*valakkam*). Despite the tension between them *din* and *valakkam* are apprehended as a totality by those that live in the Muslim house.

Post-marital residence is matrilocal and the rights to the house property belong to women. Invariably a daughter is given a share in the house as part of her dowry and her parents continue to live there as well.<sup>2</sup> A Muslim man is a newcomer to the house at the time of his marriage and his position in the house seems to be that of a permanent guest; albeit an honoured one. The tenuous position of men is reflected in the fact that some fathers are referred to as strangers by their children (Yalman, *ibid*:287). Alternatively a man may refer to his wife as *vidi kari* - the owner of the house

---

<sup>1</sup> They pull one end of their saris up over their heads (*mokkada*, Yalman, *ibid*:383) and move quite quickly. There are occasions when being out is unavoidable (Doctors visits etc) and if public transport is essential then it appears that other people of all communities will respect their privacy and not engage them in conversation on the streets. There is a small percentage of women engaged in work outside their homes but this work is generally in the nature of domestic services rendered in other homes, in the company of other women. *Purdah* observance in the town is closely tied to class position.

<sup>2</sup> Ideally in this area the first daughter is given "half of the house" and the next daughter the second half. The parents hope to have managed to acquire a second house by the time subsequent daughters must be married. In fact wealth is the determining factor and for the most part parents continue to live with their married daughters and their unmarried younger sisters. This contrasts with the *matri-uxorilocal residence* of the East coast where within two years the married daughter takes full possession of the natal house and her parents and (some or all of her) unmarried siblings move to another house nearby (McGilvray, 1982:43).



(ibid:288) or to his wife and daughters as "these people". Given the employment patterns, many men work in towns other than their own and may return once or twice each month.<sup>3</sup> With the aging of his wife's parents and eventually their deaths, a man gradually comes to be a powerful force in the house and may eventually control all the property associated with it.<sup>4</sup> His power may be shared with the husbands of his wife's sisters and if the marriage founders, it will be he who will leave while the woman and her children remain. In day to day terms however most houses are owned and organized by women (sisters). A man's freedom of movement within the house is restricted by the necessity of avoiding his wife's mother and his sisters-in-law. The house is primarily the domain of women and men go to considerable lengths to stay out of their way.<sup>5</sup> As they grow up in their natal homes boys know that they will marry into the houses of other women, possibly in other villages or towns. Indeed as both marriage and matrilocal residence are universal amongst Muslims they have to marry to have somewhere to live. Ideally brothers should help marry their sisters by contributing to their dowries before they themselves marry. After marriage they will be expected to help marry their wife's younger sisters. Brothers are always welcome in the homes of their sisters however and maintain the right to eat there.<sup>6</sup>

All Muslim houses in the area have a public/private, division often marked with a curtain across the interior door of the front room. In general the front room of the house is open to the street and used

---

<sup>3</sup> As an indication of the degree to which husbands become part of their wives' households I was intrigued to find that most men do their own washing. Mothers would sometimes wash their son's clothing and daughters would occasionally wash for their fathers but in general it appeared that adults washed their own clothing.

<sup>4</sup> He can never force his wife to sell the house however.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Bourdieu's (1973) indication that Berber men should be out of the house during the day, most discussions of Muslim households or purdah seem to imply that the onus of avoiding men within the household rests entirely on the women.

<sup>6</sup> Yalman argues that the dowry payment achieves a "change in allegiance" by the groom (ibid:303) but in practice these relationships vary with the personalities and the circumstances involved. There are no hard and fast rules, particularly in the urban contexts.

to entertain male guests.<sup>7</sup> Young males are permitted the run of the houses that they visit and are often called upon to run errands for the women. After the age of puberty however, even if they are relatives they are restricted to the public areas of the house.<sup>8</sup> Females who visit the house will retire immediately behind the curtain to converse with the women; the front room being clearly the public domain and reserved for men. If women wish to visit other households during the day they will often hire an ox-drawn buggy with curtained sides so that they can travel without being seen. At night however Muslim women have more freedom since they can slip from one house to another through the darkness. Muslim houses tend to be open at night and it is a good time for men to visit each other.<sup>9</sup>

The occasion of menarche for young women marks the end of their public social life and their subsequent confinement to the domestic domain.<sup>10</sup> There is no public celebration of the event and from this

---

<sup>7</sup> The degree of compliance with this ideal depends on the wealth/class position of the household and its location. The larger middle class households always have one or two open rooms in the front of the house which are not used by the women during the day. In some of the smaller houses on a local housing estate for example, there is only one room apart from two bedrooms and a kitchen. Here the practice is to place curtains across the front door but tie them back, with a second set across the door to the back half of the house (second bedroom and kitchen). In this case the front room of the house is treated as the woman's domain until guests arrive whereupon she will retire to the back of the house as long as they remain. In the very poorest village houses where there is only one room, when guests arrive the woman will retire outside the back of the house. In this case she is 'outside' the house but 'inside' the village.

<sup>8</sup> In most cases circumcision occurs between ages 7 & 12. In this instance puberty is read as 'marriageable' and related boys and neighbours were not restricted until about age fifteen.

<sup>9</sup> This was a major point of contrast between Muslim and Sinhalese houses, and Muslim and Sinhalese women. The Sinhalese houses tend to be shut up as darkness falls and women tend to stay indoors to protect themselves from the attentions of the demonic.

<sup>10</sup> Informants estimate that less than 10% of girls in this area continue at school after puberty (but cf ff 18 below). In general they were either at a Catholic boarding school in Matara (wealthy families) or the daughters of working class families who had recently acquired some wealth (a son in the Middle East) and were seeking to educate their daughters in order to make better marriages.



point on the woman will no longer pray during menstruation.<sup>11</sup> At this point the outside/inside, public/private dichotomy achieves a stark reality for women. They now embody the purdah aesthetic - they are virginal, fertile and enclosed. The Muslim house is the locus of that fertility.

## 8.2 Marriage Patterns.

9 Muslim marriage is ideally isogamous, endogamous and matrilocal. The Tamil language and kinship terminology used by the Muslims encodes a Dravidian kinship system that reflects a preference for cross-cousin marriage. For Tamil speakers male cross-cousins (**machan**) and female cross-cousins (**mainee**) have terminologically given claims on each other as marriage partners and there is a preference for marriage on the mother's side. This **matrilateral parallel cousin marriage** is marriage between the children of sisters in which the sisters and the children continue to share the house.<sup>12</sup> The Tamil kinship terminology also prohibits parallel cousin marriage; these individuals call each other brother and sister (**nana** - elder brother [FB/MZ elder son], **thambi** - younger brother [FB/MZ younger son], **thatha** - elder sister [FB/MZ elder daughter], **thangachi** - younger sister [FB/MZ younger daughter]). Although permitted according to Islamic ideology these marriages (**nana/thangachi**) are regarded as somewhat incestuous by others. The employment of Islamic ideology to justify parallel-cousin marriage although rare is known to occur where wealth or status must be protected.<sup>13</sup> Marriages between actual cross-cousins are not so common though more distant relatives are

---

<sup>11</sup> This is a clear example of Islamisation. It was commonly celebrated two generations ago and secluding a young woman with a piece of iron to protect her from demons is still common. In mixed company an older man joked that a young woman there had been secluded with a railway girder!

<sup>12</sup> The term **sahalappaddi** refers to the bond between two men who have married two sisters (Yalman, ibid:293, ff11)

<sup>13</sup> Informants state that in Chinafort, Panadura and Akurana matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage does take place now, whereas it didn't previously. When the preservation of wealth or status demands it the Islamic possibility over-rides the strictures of the Dravidian kinship structure. Moulana status is inherited patrilineally and in the South there seemed to be a concern to marry Moulana women to other Moulanas. A Moulana informant from the East Coast said that most Moulana families there allowed their daughters to marry anyone as all the children of the sons would be Moulanas. I observed one case of parallel-cousin marriage between the children of two sisters who had married two brothers.

often marriage partners, with a definite bias towards marriage on the mother's side.

In practice more than half the marriages in the Muslim community take place between non-kin. In a predominantly trading community this is the most effective way of expanding economic opportunities. Men are quite mobile and often work and later marry outside their natal area. It appears that maximizing one's wealth possibilities is the governing factor, though social class and caste are factors taken into consideration. Marriages are almost invariably matrilocal, the only exceptions being neolocal residence in some cases and virilocal residence where the husband is of much higher status than the wife.<sup>14</sup> As early as 1888 Ahamadu Bawa argued that "matrimony among the Moors of Ceylon is merely a 'matter of money' (ibid:219)<sup>15</sup>. His criticism was based on the fact that love and courtship were of no concern but that caste and dowry were vital. The fact that dowry is not an Islamic custom is widely recognized in the community but few have been able to ignore it.<sup>16</sup>

I surveyed the frequency of marriages to relatives and non relatives in three villages. In each case the sample was 25% of households in the village. The results are in the tables below (8.a, 8.b, and 8.c). Various categories of relatives were elaborated in the survey and this included distant relatives on either side of the family with details of the precise relationship unknown. All of these categories were assessed as relatives for the purposes of the survey. The results clearly indicate that Muslims in this area are more likely to marry non-relatives and strangers, than relatives of any type or distance. This has to be interpreted as the influence of the religion on the culture and language.

---

<sup>14</sup> Virilocal residence, the Middle Eastern preference is generally negatively valued in this cultural context. I knew of only one case in the research area in which the young wife of a young and very wealthy man died and he was urged by his friends to marry again. He then married a female relative from a poor family and she came to share his house with his children. In this case he was highly regarded.

<sup>15</sup> In a paper entitled "The Marriage Customs of the Moors of Ceylon" that he read before the Royal Asiatic Society.

<sup>16</sup> The dowry requirement makes it difficult for women from poor families to marry (cf ff14 above) and there is not infrequently a suggestion that the rich should help endower them.



Table 8.a

<b>KAPUWATTA</b> <b>Marriage Patterns</b> Sample 29 households - 101 marriages			
	Male	Female	Total
No Relation/Stranger	69%	73%	71%
Previous Relation	31%	27%	29%

Table 8.b

<b>HORAGODA</b> <b>Marriage Patterns</b> Sample 20 households - 66 marriages			
	Male	Female	Total
No Relation/Stranger	55%	56%	56%
Previous Relation	45%	44%	44%

Table 8.c

<b>MADURAGODA</b> <b>Marriage Patterns</b> Sample 36 households - 102 marriages			
	Male	Female	Total
No Relation/Stranger	53%	55%	54%
Previous Relation	47%	45%	46%

The figure for marriages to non-relatives in Kapuwatta (71%) is much higher than the figures for marriages to non-relatives in Horagoda (56%) or Maduragoda (54%) and is probably closer to the norm in the research area as a whole. Kapuwatta is a comparatively wealthy village where most people these days are engaged in trading (particularly textiles). The majority of Muslims in the research area were urban traders and thus could be expected to reflect the patterns of marriage in Kapuwatta. Horagoda is an agricultural village and

marriages in Maduragoda must be caste endogamous, limiting them to Ande enclaves in Galle, Matara and Colombo. Given this requirement for caste endogamy and the limited number of possible villages from which to select a spouse the Maduragoda figure for marriage to strangers is higher than expected. There must be a fairly high percentage of marriages to distant kin which doesn't appear here because the villagers choose not to recognize it.<sup>17</sup> In Horagoda, a rural farming village, the 56% figure for marriage to strangers reflects the widely acknowledged land pressures. There is according to local opinion, a high tolerance of "love-marriages" and post-marital settlement outside the village (neolocal residence). This figure will no doubt increase as the village population continues to grow and more young people seek to settle outside the village. The total amount of land that can be farmed is limited and in most cases the inherited plots can not be further divided and still effectively farmed. The land pressures necessitate a relatively stable population.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the terminologically given preference for cross-cousin marriage we have seen that the majority of marriages are to non-relatives. Thus the cross-cousin relationships are not creating marriages but on the other hand because of the terminology we find that **marriage creates cross-cousins**. A man who marries a stranger wife will address her brother as **machan** (MBS FZS) from that point on. In this instance the economic relation (marriage) creates the kin relation which in turn fosters economic relations.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Another possibility is that they only trace relatives for a few generations where questions of marriage are concerned. This would fit with the time it takes to move from the Moula caste to the Nala Manichal caste. However I completed a genealogical chart of the entire village to a depth of seven generations back to five founding ancestors. Obviously this problem requires further research.

<sup>18</sup> This village is notable for its markedly different attitude towards female education after puberty and almost all the young women complete their "O" Levels and some continue their education outside the village when finances permit. The local headmaster is a prime factor in this. He insists that education is a good thing and that educating the women **within** the village preserves their purity. A number of women from this village attend teacher training college and later seek employment as teachers where they often 'fall in love' with and marry Muslim men (also teachers in some cases).

<sup>19</sup> It was Malinowski (1930) who first argued that fictive kinship (kula partners) fostered the practice of trade and the trading ethic.



### 8.3. Marriage Rites.

The following description and analysis is based on a wedding between a local man and a woman from a nearby town. The two families were both members of the middle class and had no relation or friendship before the wedding arrangements took place, and the initial introductions were arranged through a marriage broker. It is therefore both relatively elaborate and a representation of the extreme case of wedding ritual where the rite actually joins two families together.<sup>20</sup>

The household of the prospective groom consisted of his mother (*umma*) and father (*wappa*), his elder sister (*thatha*), her husband (*machan*) and their daughter and son (*mahal* and *mahan*) the groom himself (*mapillai*) and his younger brother (*thambi*).<sup>21</sup> This house will eventually pass totally to his sister but even today she runs the household entirely as her mother is ailing. The groom's house<sup>22</sup> is located on a large block of land which contains two other houses belonging to his father's two married sisters (*maami*).<sup>23</sup> The groom's father is a relatively wealthy businessman who runs a cycle and electrical goods shop in conjunction with his two sons and a number of Sinhalese employees. The family decided that they wished to find a bride (*pon*) for the eldest son but they did not want to look among their relatives.

---

<sup>20</sup> The description is based on the one complete set of marriage rites that I have witnessed, from the initial soliciting of a marriage broker, through the marriage rituals and finally to the period shortly after the marriage when the new couple reside for a short time in the home of the groom although their permanent place of residence will be with the bride and her kin. In general my observations were limited to either the wedding or home-coming events to which people invited me freely. The Nikah being an all-male religious event, my only opportunities to attend were two instances where I knew the families well. In one of these cases I was restricted to female space and observing with the women from the 'back of the house' and in the other I observed from the public side of the house under 'mosque restrictions' - from the open doorway of the room being used, without standing on the haram space.

<sup>21</sup> All terms refer to groom as ego.

<sup>22</sup> This house is the groom's sister's house but for the sake of this discussion I will speak of the bride's and groom's houses and households.

<sup>23</sup> This is an odd arrangement and I believe that the groom's father bought the land and built houses for his sisters there.

The bride's father was formerly a headmaster in a nearby town and his wife's house stands beside that of her sister. The bride is the eldest child in the family and has a younger brother and two younger sisters. It is important that the first marriage contracted by the family is a good one so that the other daughters will also be able to marry when they are old enough. The two families were unknown to each other directly prior to this event though it is likely that in each group of relatives there was knowledge of each of the fathers given the public nature of their occupations.

The first step in arranging a marriage between strangers is **contacting the broker**. Both the fathers in this instance have alerted the broker to their needs for a spouse, their respective financial and social situations, the groom's prospects and the forthcoming dowry.<sup>24</sup> If the broker thinks that he may have a possible match he **nominates a possible spouse** and each of the families then researches the other through their own connections. If both parties remain interested then the negotiations continue. If either family finds the proposed match unsuitable then the cases remain with the broker who will suggest new matches. The bride's father is interested and he arranges a time to visit with the broker; this is known as **mapillai parka varai** (coming to see the bridegroom). They go to see the groom at work in his father's shop and then meet his father at the house to discuss the dowry (the gold jewellery, the house and property) that will pass to the bride. The groom's family are satisfied with the proposed dowry and the character and economic situation of the bride's family and they then arrange a day when the groom's female relatives will visit to see the bride.<sup>25</sup> The formal visit having been agreed to and a date set the groom's older sister paid an **unannounced call** at the house of the bride to see the house and family as they really were and not when fully prepared for a formal visit. They

---

<sup>24</sup> The broker's role is an important one in a situation where as many as 70% of the marriages take place among strangers. The stereotype of the broker is of a man who has a pocketful of photos of young men on one side and a pocketful of photos of young women in the other.

<sup>25</sup> If at this stage the dowry is not sufficient but the woman is considered a suitable match then further negotiations about the dowry may be entered into. In this case the dowry was Rs50,000 a (half) share of the bride's family house (initially they will occupy the main bedroom), a bedroom suite, a set of gold jewellery consisting of thali, ear-rings, bracelets and necklace and a number of saris.



asked to speak to the bride's mother and when she came to the door said "Where is your daughter?" They then looked around the house. This provided the chance to see the bride without her fine clothes and also allowed the visitors to check on the general standards of the household (what degree of control the young women are subject to for instance).<sup>26</sup>

This is followed by the formal visit which is referred to as **pon parka** (bride looking) or **malay pordu** (chain to put on). A group of the groom's close female kin visited the bride's house bearing gifts.<sup>27</sup> The groom's sister led the party into the house and a younger sister of the bride sprinkled rose-water on her as she entered the gate. The bride's mother greeted everyone with her head covered and then put some scented oil on the back of each woman's hand as a gesture of welcome. The visiting party were extremely quiet and very formal. The bride was not present and a number of her female kin were in the kitchen out of view. The bride's mother, MZ and a younger (pre-pubertal) sister of the bride served the guests who were offered lavish quantities of food and plied with soft-drinks.<sup>28</sup> It was some time before the formality of the occasion began to wane despite several attempts by the hostess to lighten the atmosphere. After coffee the prospective groom's kinswomen saw the bride. She was seated alone in a fine sari in the newly furnished bedroom.<sup>29</sup> The bride was sitting with eyes downcast and nervously playing with a handkerchief and she was soon in the centre of a group of strangers (and potential senior female relatives) who took the opportunity to have a good look at her. Her own mother remained in the doorway as a mere observer and the party was controlled by the groom's sister. After some time the groom's sister looked around the room to gather

---

<sup>26</sup> The groom's sister travelled in a car with her FZ and two FZD. It was on this occasion that the actual decision was made. The groom's father had already approved the match subject to the approval of the women in the family. Thawfeeq argues that brides were formerly selected by a groom's mother, aunts and elder sisters (ibid:71).

<sup>27</sup> Grooms sister, M, MZ, FZ, MZD, FZD, ZHZ and small daughters of these women. They carried biscuits as gifts to the household and his sister carried a gold chain.

<sup>28</sup> I was told that the prospective mother-in-law "feeds everyone". There was a conspicuous display of abundance with savoury shorteats, sweets, kiribat, banana, cakes, biscuits and wattalapan.

<sup>29</sup> She is thus viewed in the room amongst the furniture and clothing that will be part of the dowry.

subtle nods of assent and then pulled her sari up to cover her head, placed the hanky on the head of the girl and fixed a gold necklace around the neck of the bride-to-be. With this act she signed her acceptance of the young woman on behalf of her brother and the whole kin group.<sup>30</sup> The bride's mother then gave a gold ring each to the sister and mother of the groom.<sup>31</sup> The groom's sister then attempted to get the bride to respond to gentle jibes and the atmosphere was altered slightly as the women encouraged the bride to talk rather than remain simply the object of their somewhat daunting observation. Eventually she began to smile though she was clearly overwhelmed and outnumbered. The fact that the bride's mother remained in the doorway suggests that the room itself as a space in the bride's natal house and future home of the groom is at this time the property of his kinswomen. By their occupation of the room and control of the bride they indicate their power in her natal home as her senior kinswomen.<sup>32</sup>

The **Nikah** is the occasion on which the marriage is formally registered and is considered to be the legal marriage.<sup>33</sup> It is also called **Shamundum** (engagement) and as a cultural ceremony is concerned with defining the new relations between the two social groups. This day includes clear religious and customary elements. A group of the groom's close male kin and family friends gather at his home. The local registrar of Muslim weddings has been alerted and he is there

---

<sup>30</sup> Women cover their heads in order to pray - or in public. This ritual act in which the women cover their heads indoors and in all-female company is thus imbued with religious significance. It is witnessed by God.

<sup>31</sup> Informants stated that each of these three gifts could have been different and that there was no particular significance in the items themselves. The gold chain could for instance have been a bracelet, a ring, a wristwatch or a gold sovereign on a chain - all these however are circular, binding and have some symbolic association with the thali - the prime symbol of a woman's wedded state. The rings given to the groom's Z and M were reciprocal gifts, perhaps 'sealing' a contract between the women. Each of the other women present was given a metallic silver tray.

<sup>32</sup> In the vans on the return journey there was much laughter and gossip about the bride herself and the state of her household. The gifts were passed around and evaluated by everybody in a state of great excitement.

<sup>33</sup> The Register is often signed on the wedding day itself. The Nikah is concerned with sexual rights and in earlier times wealthy people used to delay the Nikah until the bridegroom had entered the bride's home (Thawfeeq, ibid:72).



along with a local imam and another moulavi. Inside the house, in a large central room with open windows, the couch and the floor beside it are covered with carpets with a distinctly Eastern character creating a distinct ritual space.<sup>34</sup> The household women and the visiting kinswomen are out of sight, many of them engaged in last minute preparations for the feast that is to be served, though the bulk of the cooking is done by a team of professional male cooks, outside, in huge pots standing over fires.<sup>35</sup> A group of the bride's male kin arrive en masse and as they arrive her father and brother are sprinkled with rosewater. A spokesman from the groom's house calls out loudly to them "Why have you all come?" They reply "We want to see the bride-groom." It is only after this that the bridegroom appears. The groom is dressed in a new Western suit and is wearing a "wedding hat" - a red felt Fez.<sup>36</sup> The principal actors (the imam, bride's brother, bridegroom, moulavi, and bride's father, also in a red fez) sit on the couch opposite the Registrar's chair. Others sit or stand behind. All the men have covered their heads and there are no divisions maintained between the two groups; they appear as a single community of men and this is underlined when they pray. The register (*kadutham*) is signed and the amount of the dowry (*stridhanam*) and the *Mahr* (symbolic payment given to the bride) are noted.<sup>37</sup> This social contract is witnessed by a male religious

---

<sup>34</sup> These Middle Eastern/Turkish carpets are generally brought back from overseas trips (sometimes from Mecca) and they often feature pictures of the Ka'bah or Medina with Arabic phrases from the Qur'an as motifs in a decorative border. Their use is restricted to special occasions and as such they have the status of ritual items. They are regularly used as above or in a rathib where they function as a communal prayer mat, creating a bounded ritual space.

<sup>35</sup> There are very few people who actually list their occupation as cook, and indeed there would not be sufficient work to support a large number of them. It is a part-time occupation for men in need of extra income and there are a number of cooking "teams" that operate on a fairly regular basis with itinerant workers as needed.

<sup>36</sup> The fez also, is only used on occasions of particular importance and not as a general rule for everyday prayers.

<sup>37</sup> The register is signed by the groom and the bride's F, one witness on behalf of each family and the Lebbe from the Weligama mosque. Dowry as referred to here consists of two elements; the house and jewellery (property) given to the bride and the *kaikuli* (a cash sum) which is given to the groom and used to help pay for the wedding. The cash is in a small wooden box and after the ceremony is handed to the groom's ZH by the bride's F. The *Mahr* is a gold bangle which will match the set of jewellery the bride is having made as part of her dowry. Its value alone is Rs5000. This ceremony is

community and it is a legally binding marriage as far as Sri Lankan law is concerned.<sup>38</sup> The bride's brother then presents the groom with a silver tray of flowers, sweets, betel leaves and turmeric.<sup>39</sup> Then he places a gold ring on the groom's left hand. In return the groom gives a ring to the bride's brother.<sup>40</sup> The imam recites a short prayer and then the Moulavi takes the bride's father's hand in his own and has him repeat the marriage contract. Then he takes the hand of the bridegroom and asks him to repeat it in turn. After a final communal prayer the focus of activity broadens from the ritual space to a wider social scene and the men take their places at tables where the feast is served.<sup>41</sup>

Some members of the bride's party begin to bring into the house large trays of fruit and special foods as gifts to the groom's household.<sup>42</sup> The fruit and pachoru must be understood as symbols of fertility.

---

sometimes referred to as **sheezana panam** (dowry ceremony). In the case of a divorce the **kaikuli** is not subject to return (Mohan, 1985:50).

<sup>38</sup> Once it is consummated the marriage is subject to the Muslim marriage code and divorce may only be obtained through the Qazi court. This particular method of divorce pertains only to Muslim marriages and attempts at negotiation and reconciliation are mandatory before divorce may be pronounced (by the husband).

<sup>39</sup> The tray of sweets is followed by a cake in the shape of two hearts joined together, one pink and one blue and bearing the names of the bride and groom. The return cake (purchased in Colombo) was in the shape of and decorated as an elaborate basket of flowers. This Western innovation symbolises the new union between two young people of the middle class.

<sup>40</sup> This ring is for the bride and her brother acts as her agent (**wali**) in this instance. If the bride has no brother her father fulfills this role.

<sup>41</sup> There are tables in the groom's house and in the front rooms of (FZ) house next door. The house of another FZ is reserved for the women. On this occasion everyone is to eat from individual plates. This could indicate the separation and tension that still exists between the families socially or could merely be a mark of high status. The food is still served in **saban** but to eat from them ritually means sitting in groups on a covered and specially cleaned floor in line with the religious significance of the event. The men of the two families and their friends therefore dine together but it is a social meal.

<sup>42</sup> There are about thirty trays in all, filled with the highest quality fruit and in most cases a tray of each. Thus there are trays of pineapples, avocado pears, papaya, mangosteens, oranges, limes, ambarella, betel, lemons, several types of banana, mangoes, apples, grapes etc. The other food included wattalapan, small cakes, pachoru (milk-rice) and packets of dry and sweet biscuits.



Some of the food is placed on display and after the ceremony it will be distributed among all the groom's kin and some will be given to the poor.<sup>43</sup> This is the beginning of a cycle of food exchanges between the new kin groups.

When the men vacate the main room of the house where the Nikah took place the young girls move from the interior of the house to the main room to better observe the proceedings. Their absence was required by the religious nature of the previous event but now as only the social restrictions apply the pre-pubertal women have the right to move and mix as they please. As only the groom's kinswomen are present (this however does include guests), large trays of food are prepared to be sent back to the women of the bride's house. This food will be distributed among their relatives and close friends and the women will not have cooked for this evening. Enormous pots of rice and pots of all the curries are sent with wattalapan, bananas and the other wedding cake decorated with the names of the couple. This is the first exchange of food between the two households and it signifies their new kinship links.<sup>44</sup> The bride's family sent gifts of whole, pure fruits and in return were given cooked foods. This could suggest that bride-givers have lower status than bride-takers, even when coupled with matrilocal residence. In this cultural context among Tamils and Sinhalese cooked food "is never passed upwards" (McGilvray, ibid:93). Muslims in general do not observe the same restrictions on food but there is a tension between the families that is yet to be resolved at this point in the proceedings and this interpretation is a possibility. The couple are now considered to be married though they have not yet seen each other nor will they see each other for another two months when the "wedding" takes place. The ceremony of the Nikah is a religious and social event with all male actors. Their position as controllers of women in this marriage by proxy, and the absence of women from the religious side of the event are evident.

---

<sup>43</sup> The groom's kin here includes his ZHZ in Galle and his FB's house.

<sup>44</sup> If any major feast were to occur between the Nikah and the wedding the families should exchange gifts (Thawfee, ibid:72).

On the evening of the wedding members of the groom's party assemble at his house.<sup>45</sup> The house, nearby trees and compound are decorated with strings of coloured lights and a **pandal** (throne) has been constructed inside.<sup>46</sup> As is customary on these occasions the men gather outside and women inside. The pandal is the immediate focus of the room in which it stands and chairs have been placed in rows facing it and filling the room. The groom takes his place on the pandal under the protection of his female kin and his ZH places a gold ring on his finger and rubs scented oil on his hands. Then another male relative places a gold medallion around his neck and again anoints him with scent.<sup>47</sup> Several friends then greet him with scent and whisper words of encouragement.<sup>48</sup> The men's greetings are followed by those of his Mother and Sister.

This is a ritual in which the wealth of the respective families is on display and the women are wearing all their gold jewellery and many imported saris. The groom's ZH carries the **thali**, a sari and the **Mahr** ready to take to the bride's house. The groom's suitcase is packed and ready.<sup>49</sup> Just before nine o'clock in the evening the

---

<sup>45</sup> Weddings in all cultures here involve both a "wedding" and a "home-coming". These are two feasts, one hosted at each of the bride's and groom's houses. On each night the greatest number of guests are from the side hosting the event. Only family and close friends on each side attend both feasts.

<sup>46</sup> The pandal is essentially a raised platform covered with pink paper, on top of which has been constructed a very elaborate three sided backdrop made from foam board carved in relief, backed with pink paper and decorated with silver glitter, fernery, concealed spotlights and small strings of "fairy lights".

<sup>47</sup> This is reminiscent of the male circumcision rites in which the boy is called **sunmathu mappillai** - circumcision bridegroom. He is also placed on a chair in front of his female kin and given "wedding" gifts of gold rings and chains by males. Circumcision is clearly a male puberty rite which signifies a boy's sexual readiness and social adulthood.

<sup>48</sup> Traditionally the groom is thought to be in need of advice and support on this occasion and there used to be a role for an older man from amongst the groom's kin to speak with the groom and advise him how to treat his wife, particularly on her wedding night with the emphasis on pleasing her rather than rushing her. Contrary to the Sinhalese custom, it is not essential that the couple consummate the marriage the first night.

<sup>49</sup> It contains saris for his new wife, a sari for her mother, cloth lengths for frocks for all her younger sisters and cloth lengths for trousers for her father and brother. This symbolically indicates that he becomes a provider of cloth for her family.



groom's sister's husband takes two bowls; one of coconut milk and betel leaves and the other of betel leaves and turmeric water and performs **alathi** by moving them around in a clockwise direction in front of the groom.<sup>50</sup> After reciting the *Fat iha* with him the moulavi will accompany the groom on the journey to the bride's house.

In structural terms the groom moves from his normal position in life onto the ritual and liminal space of the pandal where he is located under the protection and observation of his kinswomen. His position is endorsed by male kin and friends who ritually greet him here, and when the women approach to greet him they cover their heads. Then follows the cultural custom of the **alathi** "blessing" by his disbelieving brother-in-law. The groom is then moved into a religious frame (under male protection) through his recital of the *Fat iha*. His subsequent transfer to the bride's house is effected under the protection of the moulavi. The assembled company have by now distributed themselves in cars (for the principal actors) and buses, which have been hired for the occasion, for the trip to the bride's house. Men and women travel in separate buses and the buses for the women park very close to the house to enable the women to board as privately as possible, most of them covering their heads before they move outside the house. The auspicious time for the "**tying of the thali**" had been ascertained by the bride's family and the convoy is organized to arrive in accordance with this. The convoy vehicles are scenes of much merriment and there are great peals of laughter and excitement as they erratically speed past one another on the journey. On the outskirts of the bride's town there is some rearrangement of the order of the cars to ensure that the car of the groom's sister (travelling with her FZD,D) is the first to arrive, followed by the other women in their buses and then the men.<sup>51</sup>

The bride's house has been similarly decorated for the occasion and a pandal has been placed in the central room facing rows of chairs for the groom's kinswomen and close friends. The bride is escorted

---

<sup>50</sup> **Alathi** - a ritual action of blessing found commonly in Hindu temples. As the groom's ZH performs this he tells me that this is against all his personal belief and opinions and that he is "following custom". He is thus, at this point, subordinated to *valakkam*.

<sup>51</sup> At Muslim events movement is constantly orchestrated to keep the gender groups separate. In this instance the women are given the opportunity to arrive and enter the house before the men get there.

to the pandal on the arms of her father and mother's brother. Delivered to this symbolic and liminal space she waits, wearing a pale pink, heavily laced Western style gown, face veiled and protected by young bridesmaids. Her status is high tonight as she is the fertile virgin bride who mediates the economic conjunction of two domestic spheres. She is the new owner of half of her natal house and will control a great deal of its participation in the market through her control of her husband.

The bride's mother greets the groom's sister and the other women at the gate and sprinkles them with rosewater. Someone offers the ritual call - "The bridegroom's people are coming. Get up, get up - make room for them". The women then take their places confronting the bride, and her mother (with her head covered) anoints the groom's sister's hand with perfume and then repeats this with all the visiting women. The women of the bride's party are in the back of the house but outside the men of both groups are mixing well, although there is some deference to visitors as far as chairs go. The men therefore constitute a common, egalitarian group for the second occasion while the women remain separated as distinct groups of kin.<sup>52</sup> When the groom arrives he is escorted (along with the moulavi, his F and ZH) by the bride's father and brother into the front room of the house, where a couch has been covered with an ornate heavy cloth for the occasion. He is joined by two close friends and this group recites prayers led by the moulavi. The groom is then immediately led by the bride's brother to a seat on the pandal beside the bride where he sits with eyes downcast. As he is arriving to take his place his sister removes the veil (symbolizing purdah) from the bride's face.<sup>53</sup> The bride's brother sprinkles the shoes of the groom with rosewater.<sup>54</sup> In return the groom places a gold ring on his right forefinger.<sup>55</sup> The groom ties

---

<sup>52</sup> The extent to which men are associated more closely with religion and women with culture is abundantly clear. It is religion however which provides the possibility of relation.

<sup>53</sup> This is the first occasion on which the couple have ever seen each other, though for the moment neither is looking.

<sup>54</sup> Traditionally he would have washed his feet with rosewater (Bawa, ibid:229). This may be further evidence that wife-takers are superior to wife-givers - in this instance with matrilocal residence the husband is superior to his brother-in-law (Gabber, 1984:245).

<sup>55</sup> These two men will henceforth address each other as **machan** (cross-cousin) thus tempering to some degree any inequality.



the **thali** around the neck of the bride.<sup>56</sup> Then he briefly places a sari on the bride's head.<sup>57</sup> The groom's sister then performs **alathi** and takes a tray with two small dishes of banana and milk, provided by the bride's mother and feeds both bride and groom.<sup>58</sup> The final ritual, **thala shotti** involves taking a tray which has rice, salt, a coconut, one or two eggs and some money on a tray and circling it over the head of the groom and then the bride. The tray is then given to a beggar and this action brings the couple good fortune.

This concludes those rites which culturally signify the marriage of the couple, although the festivities are not yet completed. During this evening's rites, the only two men present are the groom and the bride's brother. The other two principal actors are the bride and the groom's sister. The 'customary' rites constitute a peer group exchange of siblings witnessed by the kinswomen of the groom and thus to some degree, accurately reflect the ideology of South Indian marriage alliance suggested by the kin terms. In this sense the women are clearly to be seen as associated with custom. All of these rites have been performed in houses and therefore in the domain of, and witnessed by, the women. The religious and overtly male ceremonies are distinct from these.

The groom is called to the front of the house and the bride is called to dinner. The feast is served to the women (in the bride's MZ's house) and the men (in a shelter erected for the occasion). After eating the new couple are together again and surrounded by a smaller group of people from the groom's party (married women and young unmarried men). Again the bride is alone with her new kinsfolk and in her own house and there is a considerable amount of joking about the night ahead.<sup>59</sup> The evening concludes with the gift of a large

---

<sup>56</sup> The **thali** although a Tamil adornment signifying marriage is also imbued by informants with the symbolic significance of its **crescent shape**, and has thus been appropriated to an Islamic life.

<sup>57</sup> In theory she should wear this sari on the following day.

<sup>58</sup> One spoon is given to the groom and the rest is fed to the bride. The groom is meant to exclaim that it tastes just like his mother's milk (Yalman, *ibid*:302).

<sup>59</sup> At one point the male friends of the groom, occupied the bedroom where they put potato chip packets under the mattress. An effective prank, given that the walls in these houses are no more than eight feet high, most houses are built without ceilings and the rest of the bride's family are lodged in the next room.

quantity of feast food which is taken home for the young women on the groom's side who have been confined to the house.

The next day (the home-coming) begins with the dispatching of a car to the bride's house to collect the groom and bring him home where he is the subject of jokes from female cross-cousins about the previous night. The bride's younger brother arrives to invite him to lunch and in the early evening two of the groom's kinswomen (FZD and MBD) leave to "bring the bride". This evening's public activities are a repeat of the previous night but hosted by the groom's family.<sup>60</sup> As the guests arrive the men gather outside and the women take their places inside facing the pandal.<sup>61</sup> When the bride arrives at the front of her convoy she is sprinkled with rosewater by one of the young girls from the groom's household. Thus the bride is met by one of the most junior women of the house at the door in contrast to the groom's sister who was met by the most senior woman of the bride's house at the gate. There is a clear statement here about the relative status of the families and the two women within them. The bride is escorted to the pandal by the groom's sister. She again asserts her authority over the new bride but she herself has things at stake tonight. The bride is on view to their entire social and business circle and "the new relationship they have acquired" must do them proud.<sup>62</sup> In her natal house the bride was on display as the epitome of purity and fertility and her status within her kin group was markedly increased. This is the converse of her position in her husband's house where she is on display as impure junior sister.<sup>63</sup> Her marriage allows her in

---

<sup>60</sup> The guests brought gifts for the household, all of which were sets of drinking glasses in cardboard boxes. They will all be sold back to local shops within a few days for cash. They are therefore clearly in lieu of a cash gift. I observed a similar practice at some Sinhalese ceremonies where guests brought a kilo of sugar (value Rs21/- at that time) and these were likewise returned.

<sup>61</sup> The women that arrive in cars are dropped close to the doorway but there are many other women who live locally and arrive on foot slipping through the darkness. As part of a widely practiced Islamic etiquette the men tend to gather on the perimeters of the yard leaving the women room to arrive as far as possible, if not entirely unnoticed, then certainly under no close scrutiny.

<sup>62</sup> There are a number of local Sinhalese businessmen in attendance and also business people and friends from Colombo.

<sup>63</sup> It is possible that Muslim brides deliberately preserve their purity until after this night.



a sense to be controlling of her husband's family because they now have some of their fortune enmeshed in her household.

The feast follows the usual pattern and tonight the bride and groom eat together watched by the groom's sister and the all the young women of his household. Before long, the young men having finished eating, arrive to view the proceedings. They engage in much jesting at the expense of the bride and groom and to the great amusement of themselves and the young women present.

At mid-morning the next day the groom arrives home again and is followed shortly afterwards by a young boy from the bride's house (MZS) carrying a brown paper parcel from his mother. The parcel contained turmeric, limes and flowers which together signified that the marriage had been consummated.<sup>64</sup> The two families must make arrangements for the mowlood and feast which celebrate the consummation and the beginning of the couple's new life together. It is agreed that the **valima verundu** (bridegroom's feast) will take place the next night.<sup>65</sup> This feast is provided by the groom in his wife's house. Informants stated that the **valima verundu** had a religious sense but it also has clear customary elements. It is the groom's first marketing day after the wedding and he must cover the entire cost of the feast. He is also required to purchase a number of symbolic items (fish, turmeric, sweets/toffees, a saucepan and a spoon). The mowlood that will be recited is the **Subuharnan** - the life story of the prophet. This whole evening is a ritual rehearsal for the new couple's joint life witnessed by both their families and religiously endorsed by the recital of the mowlood which is both practical guide and prayer of thanks. The front room of the house has been ritually washed and prepared for a religious event and the groom greets both his wife's father and wife's brother with rosewater as they walk into the room. This is a symbolic recognition of the fact that half of the house has passed to his wife and that he now controls it. They are followed by the male members of the groom's family and with the help of the moulavi they recite in Arabic, the

---

<sup>64</sup> I was told that "In Batticaloa they (Muslims) have to show a white sheet with bloodstains to the mother-in-law otherwise she will scold".

<sup>65</sup> It is also called **mapillai sharpadu** (bridegroom's feast), **madi-mankay** (waist-mango) (Bawa, ibid:233) and **madi-manga** (waist-mango) (Thawfeeq, ibid:74).

life story of the Prophet. The essence of this evening's ritual is to bless the future, to foreshadow it and endorse the new order with the good will of close kin and the blessing of God.

During the mowlood recital the groom's sister is supervising the dressing of the bride in a sari provided by the groom.<sup>66</sup> One of the important aspects of the evening is that the bride performs the "first serving of the rice". Up until today she has done no work in the house since the wedding and they say "she is starting her life as a housewife". She serves the rice for the first time wearing the new sari that her husband has provided for her; rice that he has provided, cooked in a pot and served with a spoon that he has purchased. This evening clearly ritualizes the new responsibilities and appropriate tasks of husband and wife. All the women cover their heads and the new wife spoons several servings of rice into the saban, followed by her husband's sister and her mother. Then the feast is served. On this occasion fish must be cooked and eaten by those present. After the wedding there is a prohibition on eating fish in both households until after the mowlood which follows the consummation.<sup>67</sup> The men eat first in groups of six and they are followed by the women who eat in the same manner. The valima virundu marks the ritual joining of the two families in both cultural and religious spheres. The men recite a mowlood together and then eat as Muslims from common dishes in ritual space. The women also "cook" together and ritually share the feast as **Muslim women**. The new social

---

<sup>66</sup> I had remarked to the groom's sister at the time of the wedding that the bride's family had perhaps gained a son and in sharp contrast to my view she had replied with reference to the bride, "She's ours now!" Despite the fact that residence is matrilocal she did not regard her family as having lost a son. She clearly regarded her brother's new wife as subject to her control as a junior kinswoman. Her actions on this occasion, in the bride's house and in the midst of the bride's family, were totally and publicly in accordance with her stated belief. She instructed the bride to put on the underskirt and then dressed her in the sari herself. She also sent the bride off to brush her hair and when not pleased with her efforts instructed her to do it again. Her behaviour was completely atypical of her customary attitude and demeanour.

<sup>67</sup> No-one seemed to know the significance of fish. Thawfeeq suggests that only chicken and mutton are eaten between the wedding and the valima and on this occasion fish must be eaten because it is an "everyday food" (ibid:71). I point out that it is the food item that appears at all 'births' in the community and this is the birth of a new Muslim reproductive unit. The possibility exists that fish is an ambiguous food category - since it does not have to be sacrificed it may embody fertility.



order is thus endorsed though this evening's feast and rathib. Within this religiously endorsed order it is the religion itself that is dominant.

The last wedding rite of major significance is the day after the valima verundu when the bride comes to lunch at the groom's sister's house and spends her first day as a member of the groom's female kin group. This is<sup>a</sup> day of purely customary practices and may be regarded as the establishment of the bride within the female status ranking of the groom's kinswomen. She has lunch today with the married women of the household as the guest of the groom's sister.<sup>68</sup> The bride is both a guest of honour as the new bride of their kinsman and the newest junior wife to join the group. Her ambivalent status is evident in the treatment she receives. She wears the sari that was placed on her head at the wedding but has not attended to the groom's sisters instructions that she should bring along another (ornate, imported) sari to change into after the meal. The groom's sister is annoyed but seems resigned to it. The table is covered with white cloth and laid out with plates of rice, curry, salads, fruits and small dishes of wattalapan. The bride is invited to sit down near one end of the table and is offered a chair covered in a white cloth by the sister of the groom. She sits down, only to discover what everyone else knew all along - that the chair is broken. Covering her face with embarrassment she struggles to get back on her feet as everyone around her laughs with delight. Then she is offered a glass of water on a silver tray. She takes it eagerly, in order to separate herself from the chaos of a moment ago and regain her composure, but discovers as she tries to drink that it is a trick glass of water. The younger women are very keen to observe her reactions to each of these pranks and struggle to get a clear view of her expression on each occasion. The first seating is reserved for the married women and the bride's family and the party chatters freely while they wait for the bride to discover yet another joke at her expense. Soon enough she reaches for the wattalapan and on wondering what it is that is resisting her spoon discovers a huge piece of meat has been hidden in the bottom of the dish. By this time she seems to expect it and laughs along with everyone else. When the younger unmarried

---

<sup>68</sup> She is accompanied by her mother (who leaves her to fend for herself), her younger sisters (who immediately go off to play with the other pre-pubescent household women) and the groom who disappears.

women take their turn at the table the bride has her first opportunity to "spend time" as a member of the group and not on display. In the late afternoon her father arrives to the front room of the house, the younger women retreat towards the back of the house and her family become visiting relatives for the first time. The young couple spend two nights before they return to the bride's home.

The first Friday after the wedding the groom must greet the bride's mother with a **salaam**. Friday is the day of the Jumma prayer and the salaam is generally a greeting among men in religious contexts. The groom is asserting his authority in his wife's house on religious grounds and this action reflects that fact. The Bride is then expected to visit her mother-in law (**mami** - HM/FZ) for lunch and bring the food herself. She is thus extending her cultural domain and by bringing cooked food could be interpreted as further asserting her superiority. The couple once more comes to visit the groom's house for two weeks and then they take up permanent residence at the bride's. At this point the transfer of the groom is considered fully effected and the new relations between the two families are complete and ritually endorsed.

#### **8.4 Ritual Interpretation.**

There are a number of ways to view the marriage rites described above which are a combination of cultural and religious elements. The rites as a whole reveal the wedding as a social and symbolic event with overt references to fertility, reproduction, nurture and the creation of new kin relations. The rites also reveal a religious and legal contract and definite ideological statements about the correct internal ordering of the Muslim community. The wedding is also clearly a rite de passage, a dangerous transition for the young couple in which they are surrounded by a multitude of norms and supernatural supports. However it is also evident that the danger and the nature of the transition is markedly different in the case of bride and groom; they "follow somewhat different ritual paths" (Werbner, 1986:235).

All marriages establish unions and are concerned with reproductive continuity. They often create entirely new families and alliances and as such the negotiation of boundaries is always a source of possible danger and a ritual concern. Both bride and groom are transferred into liminal states at the beginning of the 'ritual process' as they are separated from their former status positions and they remain in



a liminal position until they are re-integrated as a new conjugal couple.

The table (8.d) below outlines the five major events that constitute the marriage rites and their cultural or religious basis.

Table 8.d

<b>THE CENTRAL WEDDING RITES</b>					
Event	NIKAH	WEDDING	HOME-COMING	VALIMA VERUNDU	BRIDE'S LUNCH
Venue	Groom's	Bride's	Groom's	Bride's	Groom's
Religious /Cultural	Religious	Cultural	Cultural	Religious	Cultural
Gender	Male	M & F	M & F	M & F	Female
Key Symbolic Acts	kadutham dowry Mahr turmeric  feast	Thali milk & banana  feast	Bride displayed in groom's house  feast	Subharnan mowlood marketing /fish rice- serving feast	Playing pranks on the bride  feast
Actors	B&G Male Relatives	Relatives & Friends	Relatives & Friends	B&G Families	Groom's Kinswomen
Food Exchange	Fruit to G's house Cooked food to B's house	Feast to G's unmarried kinswomen	Feast to B's unmarried kinswomen	Families fed by G and served by Bride	-
Movement of the Groom	Groom at home	Groom returns home	Groom returns home	Groom installed at Bride's home	Groom takes Bride to his house to visit

In the Muslim marriage in this cultural context however, the position of the groom appears to be more precarious and surrounded with greater social concern. His transfer from his natal house to the home of his bride is accomplished with considerable difficulty and is only guaranteed after the consummation.

The Nikah and the valima verundu are both classified as religious events for that is their major emphasis, while the wedding, homecoming and the bride's lunch are all categorized as cultural. All five occasions include the sharing of a feast by participants and reveal the separate realms of men and women. There is a certain balance to this central set of rites which moves from the all Muslim male religious event of the Nikah to the all female cultural event of the bride's lunch. The three central rites engage both male and female participants but in their specific gender groups. The wedding and the homecoming are celebrated by all communities in the country regardless of their residence rules or their religion. They are major celebrations where wealth and status are displayed and the widest social and kin networks are revealed. The valima is again a male and female event but the gender groups here are constituted by the immediate family members of bride and groom's kin. The Nikah is the wedding from the perspective of Islam; once the contract is signed and witnessed by the assembled Muslim males the couple are married. The groom does not take up residence in his wife's house permanently however until after the consummation and the valima verundu which follows. Both the Nikah and the valima are religious events and they mark the beginning and end of the groom's ritual transformation from temporary resident in his natal house to permanent resident in his wife's house. These events designate the beginning and end of 'his ritual path'. When he steps onto the pandal in his natal house he is in a liminal position but he is essentially placed under the protection of his assembled female kinswomen in his sister's house and then blessed by male friends and kin with perfume and gifts of gold. As he crosses the threshold of the house he steps over a bowl of turmeric water to protect him on his journey into the unknown.<sup>69</sup> He is immediately under the protection of a moulavi who escorts him to the threshold of the room in the bride's house which

---

<sup>69</sup> His journey is a metaphor of that of the early Arab traders who ventured into the unknown and converted and married local wives and took up residence with them. An in-depth study of the relationship between engagement in trade and marriage patterns among Muslims elsewhere in the country would be instructive.



contains the wedding pandal. The bride's brother escorts him from the moulavi to the side of the bride. This pandal also is under the protection of his kinswomen who have filled the room and the ritual action of the wedding is controlled by his sister. He spends the nights with the bride but is taken home each morning until after the valima verundu. This ritual establishes him as the religious head of her household; it is the consummation (not the marriage) which allows him the right to reside and exercise authority in her customary domain.

The danger for the bride on the other hand seems to be less problematic. The bride is escorted from her new bedroom in her natal house to the pandal by her father and mother's brother. She is placed there under the protection of young female attendants to await the arrival of the groom and his kin. As she remains within her customary domain she is safe. Indeed both her status and her power have increased dramatically - she is now located in a **domain that she controls**. As the legal marriage has already taken place her sexuality is controlled and she represents no further danger to her family honour.<sup>70</sup> To ensure her fertility turmeric (**manjal**) has been used in the cooking of the feast.<sup>71</sup> The bride is clearly offered some protection but the dangers do not appear to be great. She travels to the groom's home in the company of two of his kinswomen and is seated alone on the pandal in front of the assembled women. What protection she is offered all comes from the customary and not the religious domain. If we examine the ritual path of the bride it is clear that the critical period for her, lasts from the Wedding until the conclusion of the Bride's lunch. The movement here is from the pandal

---

<sup>70</sup> Werbner argues that in South Asian conceptions fertility rests on "controlled sexuality" and that the wedding "ritual serves to place control of this disorderly fertility squarely in the hands of men" (ibid:229).

<sup>71</sup> Turmeric is widely used in Indian weddings and has been described as 'auspicious' and sometimes as 'purifying' or 'cooling' (Beck, 1969). In the other Nikah I observed which took place at the bride's house, as soon as the contract had been signed the tray of flowers and turmeric (**manjal** - yellow) was passed through the curtain to the bride's mother who immediately threw it into a rice pounder and all the married women in the family took turns to pound it (M, MZ, M married D, MMZ). The sexual symbolism in the rice pounder itself is evident and the women covered their heads to perform this action. The turmeric was then put aside to be used to cook the feast on the night of the wedding. It was to ensure the fertility of the marriage. Turmeric is widely held to have antiseptic and purificatory properties.

in her own home where she is a high status virgin to the day spent with the groom's kinswomen as an humiliated junior wife.

The treatment of the young bride at the hands of her new female kin, and the practical joking involved all indicate that there is a great degree of tension in the new kinship relations which must be negotiated.<sup>72</sup> In this Islamic context the women embody the contradictions of status hierarchies among kin. No conflict or contradiction is permitted to emerge in the domain between the men which is identified as religious. The resolution of this conflict in the cultural domain between the women, further reinforces their distance from Islam and their identification with culture.<sup>73</sup> Hierarchy is a practice not founded in the legitimacy of the Qur'an and the egalitarian brotherhood of Islam; it is a practice founded in culture and therefore identified with women. In every event associated with the wedding the men have gathered as an **undifferentiated** group. The women on the other hand remained as distinct groups of kinswomen until the *valima verundu* when the consummation was celebrated. This religious event and joint family feast which endorsed the new order of the households was the prelude to the movement of the bride into the groom's female kin-group where the first item of business was the negotiation of relative status. As a final point of contrast the groom moves from contract to consummation (both celebrated with religious events) and the bride moves from the wedding to status negotiations (both seen as cultural concerns). The *valima verundu* marks the imposition of new religious authority in the (bride's) cultural domain and the bride's lunch installs the bride as a junior kinswoman in the groom's cultural domain. It is through religion that men establish their dominance in women's houses. The different ritual paths taken by the bride and the groom reflect their different relation to the religion and to the domestic order.

---

<sup>72</sup> This is especially strong in the sister-in-law relation between the new bride and the sister of the groom who does her best to assert her authority (as a senior wife in the kin group) in both houses. Eventually of course she will see her brother turn his attentions more towards his wife's family and away from her own and in the long run the bride will control his attentions and his loyalty.

<sup>73</sup> It has its similarities with the "women breed conflict" argument identified by Gluckman (1950) among the Zulu where the inevitable competition for resources among brothers (on behalf of their sons), emerged as witchcraft accusations between the women, leaving the ideology of patrilineal solidarity unthreatened.



The wedding rites bring both religious and customary elements into play and asserts their appropriate relation. Any possible contradiction between Islam's patrilineal ideology and matrilocal residence is overcome through the ritual. The internal symbolic dynamic of the rites constitutes a symbolic analysis of the terms of existence in a Muslim reality. This reality specifies the nature of male/female relations, the relations between kin, the nature of domestic units and their correct articulation into the wider economic and political reality. **Valakkam** is that which is subordinated and encompassed to **din**, as **female** is to **male** and **domestic** is to **mosque**. The rites finally reinforce much of the **din/valakkam**, Arab men/local women, dichotomy that characterizes so much of Muslim reality here. Marriage is a 'rite of conversion' which is the prime element of the reproduction of Southern Sri Lankan Islam.

## Conclusion:

Muslims in Southern Sri Lanka live in a world rich with religious and cultural meaning. In this thesis I have endeavoured to penetrate and illuminate the particular world of a Sri Lankan Muslim community. My intention was to document a view of Sri Lankan Islam as Muslims of Southern Sri Lanka live it. A guiding concern has been to discuss what constitutes Islamic practice in this local context. I have argued that attention to the wider cultural and cosmological schemas which constitute the horizons of Muslim experience, and within and against which they reproduce their Islamic world, is critical. Sri Lankan Muslim religious practices and understandings constantly engage and reflect those horizons.

In my efforts to understand Muslim reality and Islamic ideology in this community I have examined the daily and calendrical religious practices that reproduce the Muslim world. Mosques are the heart of the Muslim community, indeed icons of it, and my discussion of the feast practices reveals how (bounded and corporate) village identity is constituted in the mosque. Whilst mosques may often be interpreted as both male and Islamic spaces, the articulation of the mosques with the domestic order in this context is clear. Mosques symbolize communities and here communities are based on households which are the domains of female kindred. Women have subtle but elaborate connections to the mosque and its realm of practice. The links between household and mosque are defined by frequent food offerings as part of a calendrical cycle of feasts which nurture and reconstitute the ummah. In this cultural context both ritual practice and the patterns of mosque organisation reflect the fact that the community is the base of the mosque. Men through the religious marriage rituals re-constitute households as part of the Islamic domain by 'converting' women, and women gift the power of their fertility to the mosque and enable the constant renewal of the community. The cultural (and hierarchical) world of women constitutes, through the aegis of the mosque, the religious (and egalitarian) community that is the ummah.

The cosmological dimension of Islam in any particular context shapes both religious ideology and ritual practice. My discussion revealed that in Sri Lanka virtually all mosques are attached to the shrines



of miraculously revealed Middle Eastern saints. The presence of the entombed saints acts to sacrifice the island's Islamic spaces, and places the island centrally within 'Arabic' cosmology as the point of man's origin on earth. The presence of the saints further establishes the orthodoxy of the mosques. The myths of the shrines in this geographic and cultural region clearly indicate that the meanings of Muslim shrine practices can not be fully understood outside of their specific ideological contexts.

I have examined the history of the Muslim community in the island and the sedimentation of mythic origins. In the late colonial period those myths were employed in a discourse of great political import. The economic domination of one group of Muslims was extended and legitimated by appeals to an ideology of Arab trading ancestry. The history of one became the myth of the many. Historical circumstances have led to a particular conception of Islam in the island, one in which there stands a contradiction between "foreign men" and "local wives". In this Islamic community, men are regarded as religiously pure, the agents of an Arabic presence long extant on the island, who established Moor communities through the conversion and marriage of local women. Further, in a particular conjunction this broader historical diversity of the community has become condensed, through a totalizing ideology, to a union between Arab men and local Tamil women. Women, who within this context are avowedly local and indigenous, are regarded as the agents of a local culture. Thus structurally the community is consistently represented through a kind of dualism which associates men with religion and women with culture. Within this dualistic conception men, as agents of Islam, stand in dominant and incorporative relation to women, as agents of culture. The history of the religion's arrival and penetration into the island, is enduringly reflected and continues to have a force in the present, through the structuring and interpretation of marriage rituals within the community.

The conceptual dualism in which men are associated with *din* and women with *valakkam* has been a constant theme of my observations and analysis and was demonstrated in analyses of both religious and calendrical rituals and domestic rites of reproduction. It must be stressed however, that this dualism is a particular one, borne of a particular historical experience and interpretation of the introduction of Islam into the island, and incorporated and elaborated in symbolic and mythic understandings. It may not be

reduced, out of its cultural and historical context, to a simple opposition between men and women, or alternatively to an opposition between religion and culture. In fact this dualism is not strictly oppositional at all, relying as it does on the constant conversion of one of the elements - women, through the incorporative and transforming action of the other element - men. This Muslim community creatively orders the unification of male and female in order to reproduce itself.

Much that is specific to the Muslim community of Southern Sri Lanka has been outlined here, but although the Muslims appreciate dimensions that are culturally and historically unique to them they also see themselves as part of a world-wide Muslim community - the Islamic ummah. The island of Sri Lanka is incorporated into the wider Islamic world on a number of levels. Cosmologically they understand the island to be the place where man first set foot on earth and to which the tombs of (Middle Eastern) saints will miraculously return. Historically they are linked to various countries of the Middle East whose traders settled and established Ceylon Moor communities which converted to Islam. At the ideological level they share a sacred text, beliefs and many practices with Muslims throughout the world. Their incorporation into the wider Muslim world however, is most significantly achieved through their calendrical ritual practice. Indeed, I would argue that the wider Muslim world is constituted through ritual practice and the ideology of the ummah that is clearly essayed in the performance of the Hajj. These links are at the ideological rather than the experiential level for the vast majority of Muslims in this cultural context but their ritual reality establishes their particular community as part of the Islamic world.

The unity inscribed in calendrical ritual practice should be a focus of future anthropological analysis. The delineation of specificity, of many and various 'Islams', is crucial to begin to understand diverse Muslim realities, but we can too easily overlook the unity that is also a fundamental element of embodied Islam. Just as it was a mistake to assume that Islam was simply a prescribed set of practices, universally applicable and not worthy of analysis, so too it would be short-sighted to overlook the possibility of effective ritual unity.



Anthropologists have analyzed the particularities of Islam in local contexts and the dynamic tension internal to Muslim communities borne of the contradictions between the cultural reality and the Islam of the Shariat. Eickelman (1982) believes we should now explore "the middle ground" between "the Islam of all times and places" and specific Islam.

Exploration of this middle ground also facilitates an understanding of how the universalistic elements of Islam are practically communicated and of how modes of communication affect religious universals (Eickelman, *ibid*:11).

Among his suggestions for crucial and as yet insufficiently studied topics is

(T)he pilgrimage to Mecca as a vehicle for disseminating or reformulating popular interpretations of Islam, (prior studies have concentrated principally upon *hajj* as a means for confirming social status or as a religious *rite de passage*) (Eickelman, 1982:11).

I submit that a more important aspect of studying the *hajj* would be to focus on the complex of rituals which culminate in the *hajj* and which define and constitute the various levels of the *ummah*. There is a clear ideology of a world-unity in Islam and what is more, a ritual process designed to establish it. At the same time it is clear that differentiation is the province and possibility of the mundane world. The calendrical rituals of Islam tie the *ummah* together and constantly renew it. But they also, as part of this process, progressively eliminate differentiation and constitute individuality at a level not possible when bounded by a specific cultural, political, and gendered, context. The ideological reality of the *ummah* in Mecca during the *Hajj* is a statement of both individuality and community in their most divinely ordered forms. This is the egalitarian possibility of Islam. If it were further explored it may prove to be a sharp corrective to some of the current fundamentalist, political discourse in Muslim communities. It is also however a more effective middle ground than that Eickelman is looking for and it may prove to be an anthropology of Islam that is closer to an 'Islamic anthropology'.

In relation to the Divine Unity - all multiplicity is a veil. (Nasr, *ibid*:op cit).





## **APPENDICES**

**A Further Description of the Research Area.**

**B The Question of Caste**

**C Muslim Dominance of Trade**

## Appendix A

### Further Description of the Research Area

The location of the research was the town area of Weligama and three other sites of Muslim villages; Maduragoda, Kapuwatta and Horagoda. I include here additional material drawn from the surveys and interviews. In Weligama I conducted a survey of businesses in the town and the results are discussed fully in Appendix C. In each of the other villages I initially collected population data from every household in the village. A random sample of 25% of the households in each village were then selected and surveyed in depth. Information was collected on household income, land holdings, employment patterns, household wealth, education levels of men and women, marriage and residence patterns, dowries, ethnicity, languages spoken, tariqa affiliation, degree of religious observance, pilgrimage and shrine practices, attitudes to purdah and any other information that the inhabitants cared to reveal. Much of this data does not appear in tabulated form but it has shaped my entire discussion.

#### A.1 Weligama Traders - Galbokka/New Street

The Muslims of Weligama today are predominantly a trading population, reflecting in their eyes, their Arab trading origins. The earliest site of Arab settlement in the town was in Galbokka (Sinhala - stony ground, stony hollow, a name which indicates its lack of value to agriculturalists).<sup>1</sup> This is an area half a mile from the beach and the centre of the town's old commercial district. As both the site of first settlement and the old trading centre this remains the heart of orthodox settlement within the town and the surrounding area. Adjacent to Galbokka is New Street (formerly New Moor Street), noted by the Portuguese in the *tombos* compiled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Abeyasinghe, *ibid*:131). New Street is numerically the second strongest area of Muslim settlement within the town and in recent periods of capitalist development has risen to challenge the dominance of the Galbokka traders. Beyond New Street and across the canal lies Maduragoda.

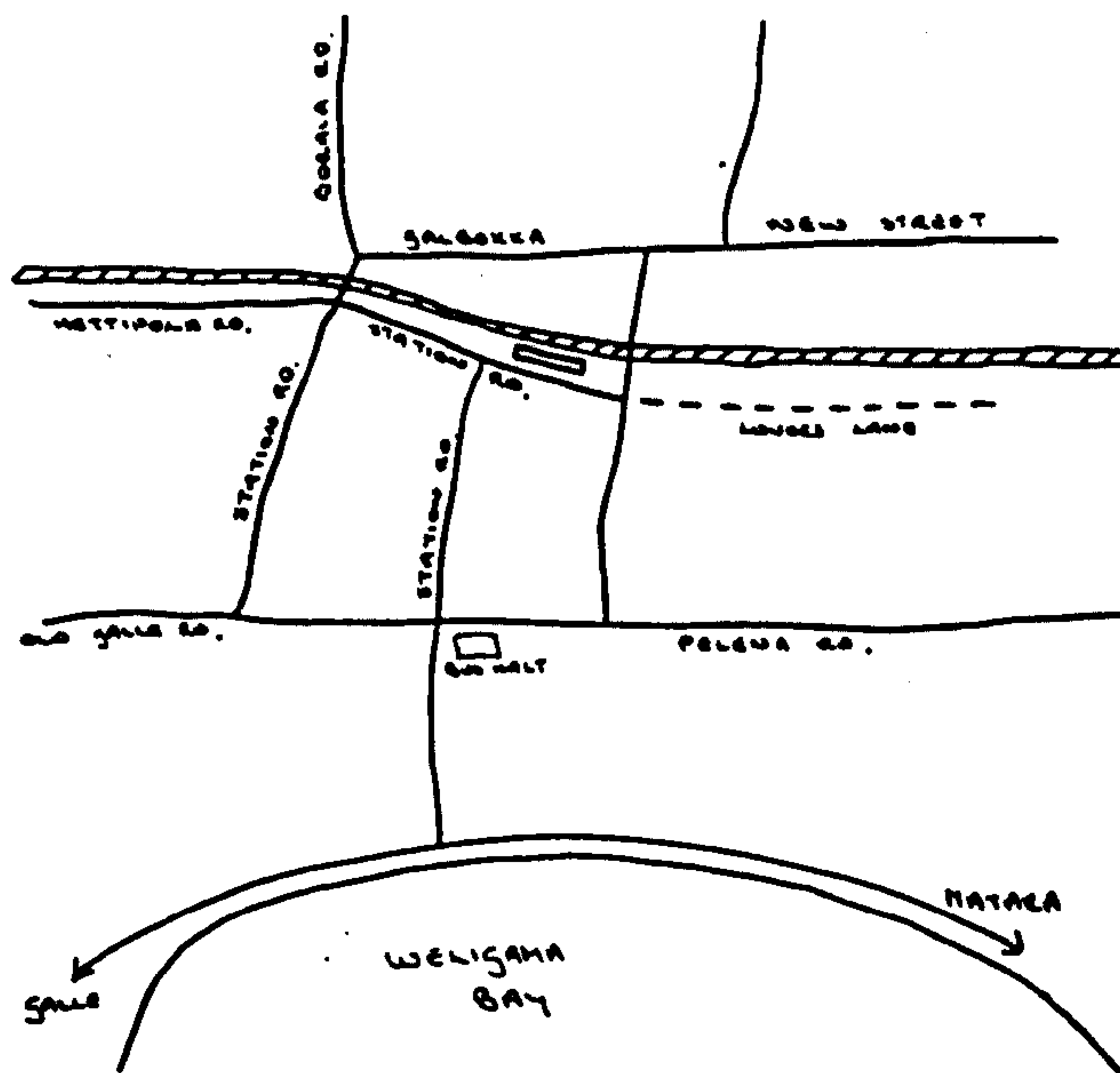
---

<sup>1</sup> One informant, an Arabic speaker, insisted that Galbokka meant "Little Mecca".



Figure A-a

## Weligama Town Area



At the junction of Galbokka Road, Borala Road, Hettipola Road and Station Road, the railway line cuts through the centre of the town, linking Weligama with Colombo to the West and Matara to the East. This major junction is the location of many of the permanent street-sellers, bridging as it does all the town's commercial areas. The commercial activity of the town today is located primarily in Galbokka and Station Road, with extensions into New Street, Borala Road, Hettipola Road and along the Old Galle Road towards the Bus Halt. Adjacent to this area between the Railway Station and the Bus Halt are the Police Station, Post Office, and two large Government Municipal Depots. In 1985 a large supermarket was opened diagonally opposite the Bus Halt.<sup>2</sup>

The commercial area of the town is surrounded on four out of five sides by areas of predominantly Muslim settlement. A pattern of settlement which reflects an historical Muslim domination of commercial and market trading in the town. The town's major daily vegetable market, where all but one stall-holder is Sinhalese, is located in Galbokka. There is a second, smaller market in Station Road where the only two occupied stalls house vegetable vendors, and immediately next to this is the town's major fish market. There is also a weekly pola (market) in Hettipola Road that sells wholesale

<sup>2</sup> Although "Supermarket" is the local term it refers to a building which contains some forty individual shops.

vegetables along with common household goods. These are clay pots used for cooking, woven baskets used for the storage of clothes, cooking utensils. coir brooms and woven sleeping mats. All of these items, sold at very low prices, are made in domestic industries and are required by all householders in the town. The shops in Station Road and the smaller surrounding areas are run by both Sinhalese and Muslim traders while Galbokka remains a predominantly Muslim trading area, with nonetheless a few Sinhalese shops. Within the local economy Muslims are chiefly engaged in trade and although a minority (23.24%) they control 46.85% of the town's business outlets.<sup>3</sup>

The Muslims have neither sought nor gained extensive representation in the various government agencies.<sup>4</sup> The Police Force, Post Office, Hospitals, Railways, both bureaucratic and municipal labouring sides of the Urban Council and the local banks are all dominated by the Sinhalese.<sup>5</sup> The local timber and coir industries are also predominantly Sinhalese fields of employment.<sup>6</sup> A small number of Sinhalese, run Guest Houses near the beach and others are engaged in servicing the two Government Rest Houses and one large Tourist Hotel

---

<sup>3</sup> In a survey conducted in 1985 it was found that of the total of 429 business outlets in the town, 201 (46.85%) were controlled by Muslims, 226 (52.68%) were controlled by Sinhalese and 2 (0.46%) were controlled by Tamils. See Appendix C for a full discussion.

<sup>4</sup> In 1984 of a total of 10 Urban Council members 2 were Muslims (seven UNP - one Muslim and three SLFP - one Muslim).

<sup>5</sup> The Muslims here provide evidence of the lack of regard in the Muslim community as a whole, for secular education. In the colonial period many of the bureaucratic jobs went to the Sinhalese and Tamil Christians with banking in particular being a Tamil monopoly. Since the revival period the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu populations have been much quicker to take up education and accelerate their representation in these fields of employment. This issue was taken up in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> The making of coir fibre into coir rope is a small source of household income in many of the poorer Sinhalese villages. The only Muslim village in which this work was undertaken regularly was Maduragoda, the poorest of villages in the area. It is a specifically female occupation and is poorly paid at a piece-rate basis by coir **mudalalis** (Sin. businessmen) who provide the raw fibre and collect the completed rope. This cottage industry is the scene of much exploitation and in particular the inhabitants of one local Sinhalese Oli village were consistently paid a much lower rate for their work than elsewhere.



just outside the town.<sup>7</sup> The only area in which the Muslims have found significant employment in the Public Sector is as teachers in the Muslim schools. Within the Private Sector however, as well as pursuing their traditional interests in trade they are well represented in the transport industry as owners and drivers of taxis, trucks, and the private buses which (along with the buses of the Ceylon Transport Board), provide much of the island's extensive transport system.

The traditionally dominant position of the Muslims in trade has increasingly been challenged by the Sinhalese in the context of the pursuit of laissez-faire economic policies by the United National Party (U.N.P.) Government which came to power in 1970. This has involved both the opening up of the island to foreign capital investment and development, and attempts by the government to break previous Muslim monopolies on particular trades.<sup>8</sup> The change of government in 1970 when the U.N.P. trounced the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (S.L.F.P.) government of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike brought severe consequences for some of Weligama's leading Muslim families. The lucrative franchises for the retail dealerships of petrol and tobacco are tied to government support and following the change of government these franchises were given to loyal Sinhalese U.N.P. supporters.<sup>9</sup> Many former supporters, both Sinhalese and Muslim, have

---

<sup>7</sup> Weligama stands beyond the main Tourist belt which runs from Negombo, north of Colombo to Galle. After the ethnic riots in 1983 and the continuing troubles in the North and East from 1984 to the present, Tourism has declined considerably and largely been confined to the Colombo - Hikkaduwa section of the coast and Kandy in the central highlands. Although during my fieldwork period there were almost no tourists passing through Weligama the large Tourist hotel, which catered almost exclusively to German Tourists on package holidays continued to operate for the first year. The hotel is located in a small private cove, beyond the Western end of the bay and its patrons never made the two mile walk into Weligama. Their engagement with the local population was limited to the Sinhalese of nearby villages who sold them tourist artifacts, and small Sinhalese girls who peddled the local lace which has been made here since the Portuguese period.

<sup>8</sup> The establishment of the Ceylon Gem Corporation is a clear case.

<sup>9</sup> This party nepotism pervades all aspects of the island's political and economic life. A change of government means also a change in the holders of many bureaucratic positions, as well as positions with major local status, such as those of Justices of the Peace. The extent to which such nepotism may be taken is indicated in the following event. In Weligama prior to 1985 there were a large

shifted their support to the U.N.P. in recent times, as the cost of doing otherwise is reckoned too great.<sup>10</sup>

Overall the Muslims are a trading population, either employed locally or working in other towns in the island. The Sinhalese by contrast are heavily represented in the Public Sector but also engaged in the fishing industry and increasingly in retail trading. The only rigid demarcation of economic activity within the town is found in the sale of beef and fish which are only sold by Muslims and Sinhalese respectively. All the beef is *halal* (permitted), being killed by Muslims in the ritually prescribed manner, and all fish is caught and sold by Sinhalese fishermen. No beef is slaughtered and no fish are caught on the *Poya* or Full-Moon days as their sale is prohibited by the laws of this Buddhist country, but in general many Buddhists eat beef, and all Muslims may eat fish.<sup>11</sup> Buddhists will never be butchers because of their ideological objections to the taking of any life, an orientation which renders butchers low in their eyes. Many Sinhalese households though, particularly in the rural areas, will rear a calf on the naturally abundant vegetation until it is fully grown, and then sell it to a Muslim cattle-dealer who will take it to be slaughtered. Muslims on the other hand, may easily be fishermen and on the outskirts of Galle there is an entire village of poor

---

number of Sinhalese fishermen and their families who had built their homes along the beach and resisted all attempts to move them. They refused to move until they were provided with land on which to build houses. They had stood united on the issue for several years, through numerous confrontations with government officials and the courts. Following a tidal wave in 1985, in which a woman and a young child were swept away and drowned, the government declared that the "squatters" must be moved. They were allocated land and small grants to build latrines and small loans towards the cost of building new houses. These people had been members of both the *Karava* and *Durava* castes living in the same area. When the new lands were allocated however the *Karava*, who had not wavered in their support of the U.N.P. were given new land within the Weligama Urban Council area, while the *Durava* who had supported the S.L.F.P. were re-located outside the Urban Council limits and thus disenfranchised in any future local elections. When the *Durava* village was completed, it was retrospectively incorporated into the "Village Re-awakening Scheme" under the patronage of the then Prime Minister (later President) Ranasinghe Premadasa.

<sup>10</sup> Access to jobs in the government bureaucracies and the banks often depends entirely on a supporting letter from a local M.P. or Council Member.

<sup>11</sup> Fish, which expire naturally once removed from water, are not required to be sacrificed by Muslims before being eaten and therefore it is irrelevant who catches them.



Muslim fishermen who use large, flat-bottomed boats, reminiscent of dhows, that are completely distinct from the Sinhalese out-rigger canoes.<sup>12</sup> In Weligama however, the fishing industry is entirely the province of the Sinhalese. The boats lit with kerosene lanterns, put to sea at night and return in the early morning with their catch. Much of the fish is immediately taken to large open-sided fishing sheds on the beach, where it is packed in ice and then transported to other centres in the island for sale. Some is set aside for drying on the road and the rest is sold in the town in the fish stalls or by street sellers. Other street sellers travel throughout the surrounding areas on bicycles or on foot, calling out their wares.

The Muslim community of Weligama sees itself as a trading community. This perception is entirely consistent with their actual position of trading dominance within the town. I argued in Chapter Three that trade has a religious value for Muslims. It is an activity which they believe to be religiously endorsed, and it is intricately connected with their **identity** as the descendants of Arab traders. Within the small field of the research area I draw your attention to the different economic positions of the Weligama traders vis-a-vis the other villages nearby. Those Muslims who are engaged in the practice of trade are those who can most strongly claim trading traditions, and further can most directly establish their links to the Arab traders of the past. This is a critical element in the internal ranking of the villages, a ranking where class and religious ideology combine to assert the absolute dominance of the traders.

## **A.2 Maduragoda - an "out-caste" village.**

Maduragoda lies on the Eastern bank of the canal, across the bridge at the end of New Street. This village is extremely poor in comparison to others in the area, and is inhabited solely by people known as **ande** (out-caste), a derogatory term.<sup>13</sup> This village, unlike other villages in the area has very clear "boundaries" and two alternative points of entry, on the **one** side. This is due to the canal on one side, and Sinhalese settlements on two further sides,

---

<sup>12</sup> There are also in Hambantota large numbers of Muslim Malay fishermen who are currently suffering the introduction (through Government Settlement schemes) of large numbers of Sinhalese settlers also seeking to fish.

<sup>13</sup> The full term was **Ande walfawel** - depend people.

but it also serves to emphasize its closed nature and the low social standing of its inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> The village is located next to a small settlement of Sinhalese Berava exorcists, who are also low-caste.

Figure A-b Maduragoda



The inhabitants of Maduragoda claim descent from a group of seven Muslims who came from Madurai in India, and settled in the Kandyan kingdom.

While they were in Kandy the Sinhalese King's daughter became ill and unable to eat, and no-one it seemed, could cure her. One of the Muslims, a **pari-yari** (native physician) offered to help and was invited to attempt to cure the girl. He was forced to diagnose her illness by feeling a thread, the girl herself being kept behind a screen. At first, in an attempt to trick him, the thread was tied to a dead cat. He exclaimed that there were no signs of life and the thread was then tied to the bed itself. He declared that the patient was beyond cure and finally having seen through the ruse he was permitted to see the girl. He recommended a treatment which cured her, and in gratitude the king granted them lands in the kingdom.

Later, the king demanded that the seven Muslims should carry his **dholaw** (sedan-chair) but three of the Muslims refused. The king was extremely angry at this and threatened to kill them. The three Muslims then fled the kingdom and came to Maduragoda. They were a **pari-yari**, a **talsimar** worker (an exorcist and maker of talismans), and a beggar or hawker.

<sup>14</sup> The name of the village itself has a certain ambiguity to it also. Known to those who live there as **Madurapura** (Madurai - village), it is routinely called **Maduragoda** (Madurai - place), by everyone else in the surrounding area. Yalman (ibid:77-79) observed that a low status village in Terutenne suffered a similar fate with a name ending in **pitiya** (place) rather than **gama**. **Pitiya** suggested a place where labourers lived (ibid:78). In the research by contrast, there were many **pitiya**'s and the inhabitants of nearby Horagoda never mentioned any negative connotations attached to the name of their village. Whether as an agricultural village - the term **goda** - place was culturally apposite I am not sure.



The myth confirms their out-caste status; in this case a status applied by the Sinhalese King. The date of the expulsion was 1730 and they were banished from the Independent Kandyan Kingdom to the maritime Provinces controlled by the Dutch. The King Sri Wiraparakrama Narendra Singha however, granted land at Maduragoda to one of the Muslims, a pari-yari known as Garibu.<sup>15</sup>

The original founders of the village were the pari-yari, the talsimar worker and the beggar/hawker.<sup>16</sup> These three occupations are still reflected in current village composition. The majority of villagers used to pursue small time hawking. The hawking of trinkets to the interior allowed them to participate in a trade which had long been the province of the Muslims in the Sinhalese areas (Roberts, 1982:83). The hawking of trinkets is less favoured these days, but petty trading interests are pursued in the absence of any other employment opportunities. One family has managed to build up a thriving business in the collection of "gunny-bags" which others in the village collect at piece-rates.<sup>17</sup> Some of the women, accompanied by their children, beg on a regular basis in other villages, visiting a particular village on the same day each week. Although they are given money by the other Muslims, who feel obliged to give *zakat* (alms), the practice of begging is thoroughly despised. This continued practice is an important factor in the low social position of this village in the eyes of other Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Given his threat to kill them, the land grant perhaps seems incongruous. However, as I pointed out earlier Sinhalese castes were determined solely in relation to the King. Thus the king could change the duties of a caste (as with the Salagama or Chalias, an Indian weaving caste who were ordered to take up cinnamon peeling) or he could render a group "out-castes". The banishment of the Muslims from the sovereign kingdom should be understood as an action which placed them outside its symbolic order, and thus "out-caste" status was a form of "social death".

<sup>16</sup> A genealogical chart of the entire village collected in 1985 ascends to five common ancestors over a period of seven generations, adding empirical support to the settlement myth.

<sup>17</sup> Gunny bags are cloth or sisal sacks.

<sup>18</sup> It appears that no-one in this village however, collects the government coupons for rice, that many of them would be entitled to. When asked about this, villagers replied "that the other Muslims wouldn't like it." Therefore, it is obviously better for the poorer Muslims to beg from, and rely upon, the good graces of the wealthy members of their own community, than to declare themselves as in

The dominant man in the village is a direct descendent of Garibu and also a pari-yari.<sup>19</sup> He owns virtually all the land in the village, and other families own only the land on which their houses stand, and none of the garden lands surrounding them. Recently many of the young men in this village have sought employment in the Middle East. As they return, and their families seek to build new and bigger houses, problems over the land ownership and lack of space may arise. This is not in evidence yet. The dominant position of the pari-yari is reinforced by the popularity of his medical practice, which is widely patronized by both Sinhalese and Muslim patients, and generates considerable wealth.<sup>20</sup> His sister's son, who is due to take over the business, has completed a Pharmacy degree, and intends to combine both traditional and Western allopathic modes of practice. As most patients seek remedies from all fields of practice, both complementarily and simultaneously, this young man is not only "modernizing", but rather consolidating his position of dominance.<sup>21</sup> There is also currently in the village, a talsimar worker, a close relative of the pari-yari, who will exorcise **shaitans** (devils) and cast spells, for those who are in need of them. He has also completed his religious training as a Moulavi.

I have described the social situation in this village, highlighting their poor economic circumstances. In particular they are utterly bound to the family of the pari-yari, and entirely constrained by their poverty. These factors are born of their historical

---

need, vis-a-vis the state. This practice of course, undoubtedly serves to perpetuate the idea amongst the Sinhalese, that the Muslims are a wealthy community.

<sup>19</sup> The family of the original pari-yari, have continued to practice medicine from his time, in a direct line of patrilineal descent. A **veda parapura** (physician genealogy) is prominently displayed in his clinic. Garibu started his practice in Maduragoda in 1730, his son Babu took over in 1772, and was followed by his son Thambi who took over in 1812. Thambi was followed by Wapu Kunchi in 1835, and his son Pakeer Medeem took over the practice in 1890. Pakeer Medeem had four children; Mohamed Sali, Mohamed Ibrahim, Mohamed Kassim and Abdul Careem. The youngest son P.M. Abdul Careem, the current pari-yari, took over in 1936.

<sup>20</sup> The current pari-yari learnt from his father, but also studied under a Buddhist monk from the nearby temple in Piriwella. In his eyes this gave him "perfect knowledge" - his own lineage knowledge, plus the Buddhist monk's knowledge. He has employed a Sinhalese assistant for over twenty years who runs "ethnic interference".

<sup>21</sup> Kapferer (1983) has argued the simultaneous and complementary seeking of remedies with relation to the Sinhalese.



circumstances which have rendered them "out-castes" and subject to land pressures. Their economic and social position is continually reinforced by their designated outcaste status and the strict rules of endogamy which act to limit their chances of social movement. The endogamous marriage rules mean that the Ande from Maduragoda contract marriages, either within the village or with other Ande villages in Galle, Matara or Beruwela.<sup>22</sup> Caste endogamy is strictly enforced, and the rare infringements, severely punished.<sup>23</sup>

### A.3 Kapuwatta - A Rifai village.<sup>24</sup>

Located in the Denypitiya area some three miles from Weligama, this village was initially surveyed because of its engagement with the Rifai tariqa. There were a total of 867 people in the village of whom 857 were Sri Lankan Moors and Muslims. There were six Sinhalese Buddhists and four Estate Tamils who were Hindu.<sup>25</sup>

Of the 857 Moors in Kapuwatta, 801 gave their tariqa affiliation as Rifai. This is a substantial 93.46%. Research in this village thus

---

<sup>22</sup> These marriages were predominantly contracted with the people of Navinna in Galla or Hotukuda Junction in Matara.

<sup>23</sup> In one case a local Moula man fell in love with and married an Ande woman and took up residence with her in Maduragoda. As a result he was totally ostracized by his own family, almost all of whom refused even to attend his funeral.

<sup>24</sup> After living in the central town area for 13 months I moved to this village for a further 9 months.

<sup>25</sup> Five of the Sinhalese Buddhists above are members of one family running a shop in the village. The other is a female of 40 years employed as a servant by a Muslim household. All four of the Estate Tamils are the Hindu children of Tamil families working in the tea estates and all of them are working as servants. One boy of 13 and a girl of 10 years have been "adopted" by one household. It is expected that these children will convert to Islam and become Moulas. When they are of marriageable age they can expect the household to arrange their marriages to other Moulas. Their "adoption" by the Muslim household does not imply in any sense membership of the kin group, rather their position as servants and converts gives them a very low status. On the other hand their adoption, does not imply any severance of connections with their own families, at least while they remain children. In general their very low wages go directly to their parents on the estates. The other two children, a boy of 10 and a girl of 13 years are similarly employed but have not been adopted. (They may quite easily convert also). There is one further Buddhist in the town who runs a laundry but he resides in Wellipitiya. The Sinhalese Rada caste are traditionally the washer caste, though Sinhalese of other castes have sometimes taken it up. There is no Muslim equivalent.

presented the opportunity to study ecstatic religious practice and economic success in conjunction.<sup>26</sup>

The name Kapuwatta, which in Sinhala means "cotton fields" suggests the movement of cotton goods rather than the cultivation of cotton locally, and certainly today, the largest single occupation in the village is work in the textile trade.<sup>27</sup> One informant stated that Kapuwatta was the name given by the Sinhalese to the Muslim settlement in the Watharamulla area and in this sense the name clearly signifies "cloth-village", the place from which the Sinhalese acquired their cloth. In the past, the members of this village were hawkers who travelled to the interior with **pottani** (a bundle of textiles) on their shoulders.<sup>28</sup> Determining the origins of the Kapuwatta Muslim community is more difficult than in the case of Maduragoda. Kapuwatta has no ancient history of Muslim settlement, although adjacent Koledande is believed to have been settled 700 years ago, well before the arrival of the Portuguese. There are no settlement myths and according to most people "we have always been here". Some informants state that "the local Muslims came to Sri Lanka on the shoulders of the Salagama". The Salagama (Chalias) were a weaving caste from India and were turned to cinnamon peeling by both the Kandyan king and the colonial powers. It is possible that some of them could have settled here not far from the cinnamon gardens of Akuressa.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively the statement may refer to the traditional and undisputed practices of hawking trade goods to the interior.

---

<sup>26</sup> There are 22 members of the Qaddirriyya tariqa, 18 members of the Shasuliah, 11 of the Jiffriyyia, 1 fell into the category of Other/Two or more and 14 who stated that they did not belong to any tariqa at all, (total responses 857). In general to state that one does not belong to a tariqa implies a clear ideological position that does not recognize divisions among Muslims.

<sup>27</sup> There is also a possible significance to the term **kap** or **kapa**, which is the central pole of Sinhalese village ritual. One which "has symbolisms of centre, permanence, fertility and prosperity" (Roberts, *ibid*:6).

<sup>28</sup> The layout of the village, almost entirely along a central road between Koledande (and Akuressa) and Weligama suggest its trading base.

<sup>29</sup> Godepitiya, just outside Akuressa is another major Rifai site and a very old Muslim settlement.



A few other villagers express the view that some Indian Muslims called "Ambay" came here on business from Kayalpattanam in Tamil Nadu and then married local Sinhalese women. The Ambay or Ambattayo were a caste who came from India with the Karava and were barbers to the Karava only (Roberts, *ibid*:92-93).<sup>30</sup> As this community has some ritual connections to Kayalpattanam today, it is highly possible that they were Indian Muslims or converted Tamil Hindus.<sup>31</sup> The associations with cloth trading could possibly also suggest that they were originally an Indian Muslim community as could the name Marrikar which was seen here in former times. Ultimately there is no clear myth of settlement attaching itself to either Indian Muslim or other Indian or Tamil origins and perhaps we should assume that origins were diverse.<sup>32</sup>

---

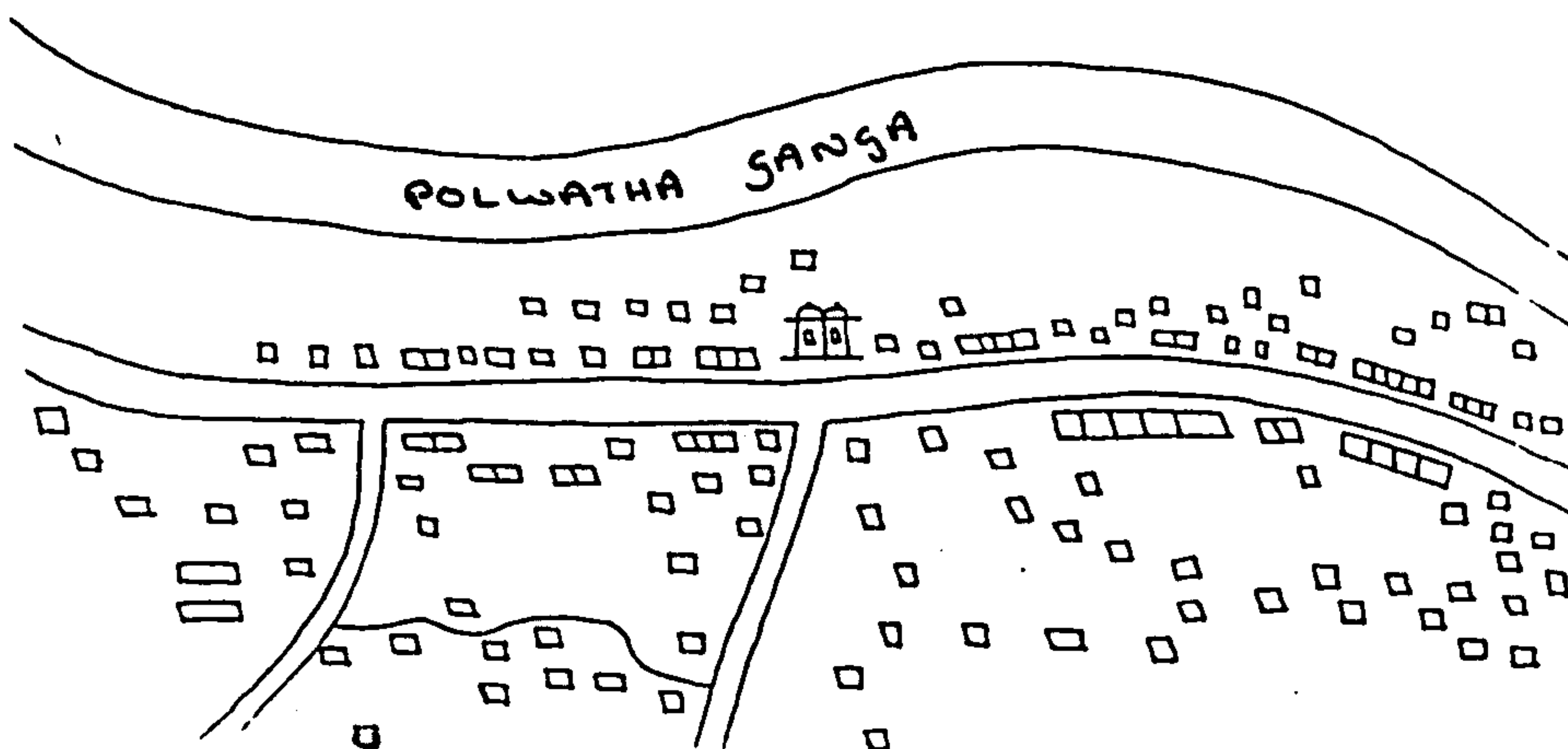
<sup>30</sup> There is also a possibility that this village is a site of Salagama conversion. Some informants state "that the (local) Muslims came to Sri Lanka on the shoulders of the Salagama". The Salagama (Chalias) were an immigrant weaving caste from India pressed into service as cinnamon peelers for the Dutch. They became the most heavily and bureaucratically controlled group of people in the island owing to the importance of the cinnamon crop. They are here located not far from the cinnamon gardens of Akuressa and on the old route through Koledande.

<sup>31</sup> As I stated earlier no-one is willing to acknowledge openly any suggestion that their village is one with a high number of converts (Moulas), either recently or in the historical past. There are a number of possibilities here. Perhaps Indian Muslims converted and married local Sinhalese or Tamil women, or Tamil families converted. A mixture of all these possibilities is very likely closest to the truth. Certainly it appears that there were a reasonable number of Hindus in this village or converts who had maintained some Hindu ritual customs until recently. One middle-aged informant (whom others identified as being from a Moula family) told me of a village curing ritual which villagers employed during his childhood. When someone in the village was ill, one member of each household would gather at the local Tamarind tree, where they would place the patient sitting with his/her back to the tree trunk. Then they would collectively cook a pot of rice gruel at the base of the tree. The Tamarind as far as I am aware is a tree which has significance for Hindus rather than Muslims, although a rice gruel is close to a popular Muslim ritual dish in Ramazan - *cunjee*.

<sup>32</sup> There have been however, recent marriages contracted with men from the Middle East, a move which increases both the status and purity of the family. A genealogy of this village revealed no family relationships beyond three and four generations, a pattern which certainly suggests relatively recent migration on the part of all inhabitants.

In the earlier days of this century the wealthier of the Muslim villagers owned much of the surrounding lands and held lands as far away as Morawaka, Deniyaya and Pittabedara. Many of the Muslims obtained their income from hawking the products of the coconut estates; copra, coconut oil, coir rope, along with areca nut, to the interior areas. All of these trade items were produced by Sinhalese labourers. The wealthiest Muslim men of the time all owned large coconut estates and bullock driven oil presses and made their money in the copra business.<sup>33</sup> At this time the Muslims say that they controlled the local Sinhalese people and physically chastised them if they felt it was required. When the Sinhalese were passing Muslims they would put their sarongs down, bow their heads and take their cloths from their shoulders in deference.<sup>34</sup> After six in the evening no Sinhalese person, labourer or landowner was seen on the streets. On the occasions of the Sinhalese New Year the prominent men of the village would visit Sinhalese homes to make the first (auspicious) gifts of money. During the 1915 riots the Kapuwatta mosque was protected by a Sinhalese headman but the nearby Koledande mosque was destroyed.

**Figure A-c Kapuwatta**



<sup>33</sup> Kapuwatta stands in very close proximity to a Sinhalese Oli village. The Oli are locally associated with oil selling, though they now make much of their income from making coir rope.

<sup>34</sup> This was part of the standard code of caste deference behaviour that functioned among the Sinhalese and Tamils themselves.



As late as 1912 in Kapuwatta there were an estimated eighty houses in the village of which more than fifty were made of clay. All of these homes were destroyed in a flood when the river was unable to drain the flood waters and the water level stood at ten feet above the village's central muddy track. When the houses were rebuilt only twenty-five remained constructed of clay. In 1916 another equally devastating flood occurred, isolating the villagers for days and destroying all the clay houses. From this point all houses were made of brick. In the research period there were a total of 136 houses in the village including a few of clay. However although the number of houses had grown considerably the amount of land held by villagers had been reduced. This is attributed to the period after 1956 and the rule of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike when much of the land was sold/given to the Sinhalese.<sup>35</sup> Now the village is surrounded by Sinhalese homes on all sides and the Muslims find it impossible to purchase land from Sinhalese landholders nearby.<sup>36</sup>

Historically the big traders were all located in Galbokka, and it appears likely that Kapuwatta stood in subordinate relation to nearby Galbokka, as far less wealthy and possibly economically dependent. At the time Kapuwatta Muslims were religiously dependent upon Koledande, where they worshipped in the Jumma mosque; a relation that is still seen in the burial of Kapuwatta Muslims in the grounds of this mosque. There is no evidence about Koledande's economic standing at the time, apart from the fact that it was located between Weligama and the road to Galle, which was a major centre. Kapuwatta was clearly not an important area of **Muslim** settlement as it did not, at this time, have a village mosque. If they were originally an Indian

---

<sup>35</sup> Before this all the land up to the Denypitiya Junction and to Koledande fell within the village precincts as well as two miles towards the interior.

<sup>36</sup> This problem exists for some in the village but other families have moved to Colombo to run their businesses and left their homes standing empty, returning only occasionally to pluck the coconuts. Of a total of 136 houses in the village, 113 were currently occupied. One house belonged to a Buddhist family and 22 were uninhabited at the time. Many houses are occupied by extended family groups. Because of the matrilineal residence after marriage there is often more than a single family to a house, (parents plus one or more married daughters). A total of 47 houses were occupied by single families, 41 by two families, 18 by three families and 7 by four family groups.

Muslim community, there is no doubt that they stood subordinately on those grounds also. Kapuwatta's relations to Galbokka were certainly the most important from a purely commercial and developmental point of view. The wealthiest men were in the copra trade and held large coconut estates and other villagers were engaged in petty trade, hawking coconut products or exchanging cloth for areca nut. The cloth traders would have had to deal with larger Muslim traders in either Galle or Galbokka in Weligama. There is still an extensive interest in the textile trade in this village.<sup>37</sup> Nowadays there are some who regularly take vans to Jaffna and sell baby-suits, socks and bonnets which are knitted in nylon thread, in knitting machines, in small scale domestic industries.

As the survey data below indicates, employment as a trader or in the textile industry is the most common occupation. Men are far more likely to be employed than women with the dramatic exception of employment abroad as a guest worker in the Middle East. In this instance males and females have relative employment rates of 50%.

Kapuwatta was a relatively wealthy village, particularly in comparison to Maduragoda (where poverty was endemic) and Horagoda where land pressures and lack of available employment were a problem. There were however households who lived in poor conditions here also. Close to 25% of the households surveyed had no toilet facilities and no electricity available. Sixty-six per cent of the households owned brick houses of several rooms with tiled roofs, electricity, piped water and good toilet facilities. All but two houses however had their own wells. In this village the water table is high and the quality of the water is excellent.

---

<sup>37</sup> The parameters of the textile trade in the area range from extensive connections into Second Cross Street in the Pettah (Colombo) to regular selling trips of Jaffna. Historically all the cloth was from India and even now the local market is not big and local cloth is not highly regarded in comparison to that of cotton cloth from India or cotton-polyester cloth from Japan. Saris from India, the Middle East and Singapore all command greater interest and cachet than the local product. (One exception is a Dutch Burgher operation in Colombo which exports 90% of its cloth). Import duties are high and reportedly smuggling is still rife in the textile trade.



Table A.3-1<sup>38</sup>

EMPLOYMENT In KAPUWATTA - (male & female) 30 households						
	Trade	Textile	Labour	Teacher	Other	Abroad
MALE	23	14	11	5	9	8
FEMALE	-	1	1	2	-	8
TOTAL	23	15	12	7	9	16

Table A.3-2

Household Annual Income - Kapuwatta (30 Households)		
Annual Income in Rupees	Households	% of Total
0 - 10,000/-	6	20%
10,000/- - 50,000/-	11	36.6%
50,000/- - 100,000/-	6	20%
100,000/- - 200,000/-	4	13.3%
200,000/- - 400,000/-	1	3.3%
400,000/- - 600,000/-	2	6.6%
TOTAL	30	99.8%

The house garden is the land on which the house itself stands. It is not necessarily used to produce food or additional income but is a very clear reflection of wealth nonetheless. Most of the villages in this area exist within coconut lands and at the very least to have access to coconut trees saves a considerable expense as coconut milk is vital to so many curries and household dishes, the husks are used to scrub pots and also to provide fuel for cooking fires. Sometimes house gardens permit the growth of coffee beans which may be harvested and sold but in Kapuwatta house gardens contain only

<sup>38</sup> This table of employment covers all workers employed outside the home and includes a high proportion who are employed outside the village. Many males work elsewhere in the island and return home weekly or monthly as circumstances permit. **Textiles** includes both men who run small cottage industries and ten young men who work as sales assistants in textile shops as far afield as Galle, Colombo and Dickwella. Not all the **teachers** work in Kapuwatta. **Other** includes a Policeman, Muazzin, Lawyer, Bank Clerk, Electrician, Painter, Watchmaker, and contrasts strongly with the same category in other villages. Here there is a far higher technical and professional component. In the **Abroad** category two males are qualified as a Surveyor and an Accountant and both are employed in their professional capacity.

coconuts and casual labour is employed from time to time to pluck them. In the table below it is clear however that 60% of the families surveyed had no coconut lands at all.

**Table A.3-3**

House Garden Land holdings - Kapuwatta (30 households)		
Size of Garden	# of Houses	% of total
No Land	7	23.3%
5-10 perches	6	20%
10-20 perches	5	16.6%
20-50 perches	6	20%
50-100 perches	4	13.3%
100 + perches	2	6.6%
TOTAL	30	99.8%

**Table A.3-4**

Coconut Land Holdings - Kapuwatta (30 households)		
Acreage	# of Households	% of Total
No coconut lands	18	60%
0 - 1/2 acre	8	26.6%
1/2 - 1 acre	2	6.6%
1 - 2 acres	1	3.3%
40 acres	1	3.3%

The household which has 40 acres of coconut land has a household head who is a coconut dealer. This figure reflects the relatively small number of wealthy men still involved in the coconut industry. This man shares his 40 acres with his daughter and two sons.

In the late nineteenth century, during the revivalist period two significant events took place in this village. First, there was a successful attempt by members of the village to seek the spiritual patronage of a religious leader from Androth Island in Kerala. Second, there was the establishment of a secular school with Tamil



teachers. Both of these events reflect a clear interest in Muslim revivalist concerns.<sup>39</sup> In an era of increasing wealth in the village owing primarily to a coconut oil boom, leading men sought to renegotiate the relative social and political position of the village in relation to Galbokka. The arena in which this could take place was within the discourse on legitimate religious dominance. Kapuwatta sought the spiritual patronage of an outsider who could claim religious and ancestral orthodoxy, and who was a skilled Arabic speaker. Both factors made him a worthy religious adversary of the ulema in Weligama. The town itself of course prided itself on a particularly orthodox character, home to Arabic speakers always.<sup>40</sup>

Through his efforts a new village mosque was established here and his family have become inextricably linked with religious life and development within the village.<sup>41</sup> The very early attempt to establish a Tamil medium secular school in the area indicates the thrust of the village leadership at the time. While Galbokka relied on its tradition of Arabic Colleges the Kapuwatta leadership were clearly concerned to modernize. Muslims in Kapuwatta made significant moves to reorganize their religious affiliations in order to establish a new legitimacy. All of this was undertaken in a revivalist context where religious origins and trading had become critical.

#### **A.4 Horagoda - A Farming Village.**

This is a small village located between Wellipitiya (5 miles) and Godepitiya, near Akuressa (6 miles) In 1986 there were 500 people in

---

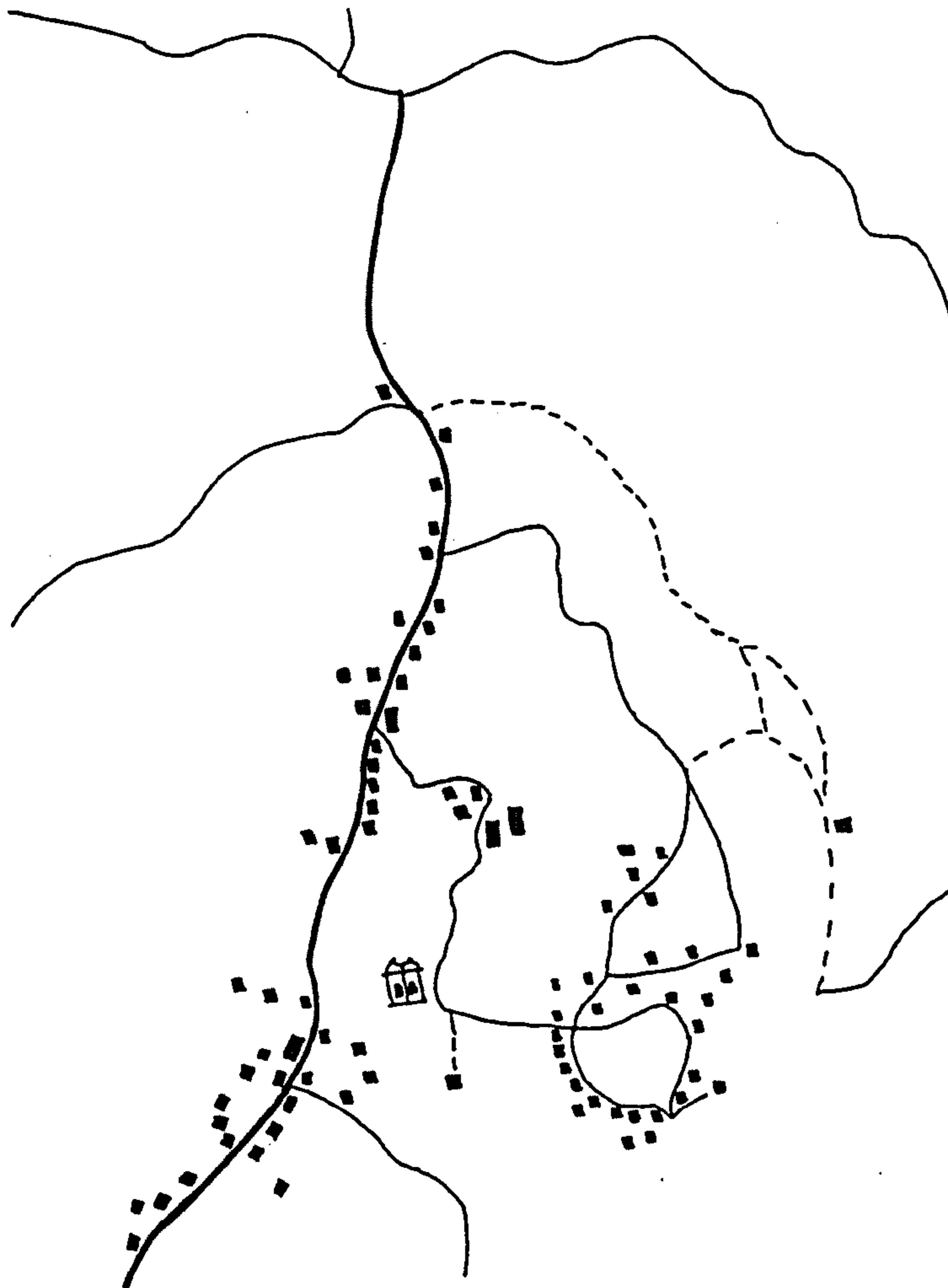
<sup>39</sup> The revival was noted to be a predominantly urban phenomenon, yet here there is evidence of its impact in a regional and semi-urban environment.

<sup>40</sup> The centenary of Baari College, Weligama, the first Muslim religious training college in the island was celebrated during my period of fieldwork and the express portrayal of Arabic connections and associated orthodoxy were clear.

<sup>41</sup> The somewhat later (1965) establishment of an active Rifai Tariqa Association, by this Androth Island family, is taken up in a later work. The building of the village mosque is discussed in Chapter Six.

70 families, the majority of whom were cultivators. The village itself is only one square mile in area with most houses strung out along both sides of the dirt road that runs through the town. The remaining houses are located on small hills on the other side of a shallow valley in which paddy is cultivated.

**Figure A-d Horagoda**



The village is surrounded by approximately 75 acres of paddy lands, 25 acres of cinnamon lands and 10 acres of tea all of which is farmed by the villagers though some 40% of it belongs to outsiders. On average each family has access to one acre of paddy land. Tables A.4-1 and A.4-2 on the following two pages indicate the size of the paddy holdings and the location of the owner or tenant farmer. Of a total of 62.0 acres of paddy covered by the survey, 41.9% is



**Table A.4-1 Horagoda Paddy Lands - Muslim Owners & Cultivators**

Horagoda Owner		Cultivator		
Plot No	Acreage	Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P 4	0.5	X		
P11	0.5	X		
P12	1.0		X	
P13	1.0	X		
P14	0.5	X		
P15	0.5			X
P16	0.5	X		
P17	0.5	X		
P18	1.0	X		
P19	1.0	X		
P20	1.0	X		
P21	1.0	X		
P22	0.25	X		
P23	1.5	X		
P25	0.75	X		
P26	1.0		X	
P27	1.0		X	
P28	1.0	X		
P32	1.5	X		
P37	2.0		X	
P39	1.5			X
P40	1.0			X
P41	1.0		X	
P42	1.0	X		
P46	0.5	X		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>

Table A.4-2 Horagoda Paddy Lands - Non-Muslim Owners & Cultivators

Horagoda Sinhalese		Cultivator		
Plot No.	Acreage	Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P5	1.0			X
P9	1.5			X
P29	1.0	X		
P30	1.0	X		
P33	1.0	X		
P43	6.0			X
P44	3.0	X		
P45	unknown			
P47	0.5	X (c.lab)		
Medawatte (Sinhalese)		Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P6	4.75			X
P24	2.0			X
Wellipitiya (Muslim)		Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P1	1.0			X
P10	1.5			X
Weligama (Muslim)		Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P2	4.5	X		
P8	1.5	X		
P36	2.0		X	
P38	1.5		X	
Galle (Muslim)		Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P3	1.25			X
P35	1.5		X	
Matara (Muslim)		Owner	M tenant	S tenant
P31	1.5		X	
P34	1.5		X	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>



Table A.4-3 Horagoda High Land Holdings

Horagoda High Land Holdings			
Plot#	Owner	Acres	Crop Description
L1	M		Home Garden
L2	M	4.0	Cinnamon
L3	S	2.0	Tea
L4	M		Home Garden
L5	M	2.0	Tea
L6	M	3.0	Cinnamon
L7	M		Home Garden
L8	S	1.0	Cinnamon
L9	S		Home Garden
L10	M	1.5	Tea
L11	S	0.75	Tea
L12	M	1.5	Tea
L13	S		Kunadasa Estate - Tea
L13A	S	11.0	Koraheligoda Estate - Rubber
L14	S		Coconut/Other
L15	M		Home Garden
L16	M		Home Garden/Tea
L17	M		Home Garden
L18	M	10.0	Cinnamon
L19	M	1.0	Rubber
L20	M	1.25	Tea
L21	S	4.5	Tea
L22	S		-
L23	M		Home Garden
L24	M	0.75	Cinnamon
L25	S		Home Garden
L26	S	8.0	Rubber Estate
L27			Market/School/Health
L28	M		Cinnamon
L29	S		Koraheligoda Estate - Tea
L30	S		Home Garden

Horagoda High Land Holdings			
L31	M	1.0	Tea
L32	32 x 40 acres		Land Settlement Scheme

cultivated by the Muslim or Sinhalese owner (26 acres), 22.6% is cultivated by Muslim tenants (14 acres) and 35.4% is cultivated by Sinhalese tenants (22 acres).<sup>42</sup> Horagoda is linked into Poruwa (Porwai) and Akuressa most closely, but as is evident in the above tables there are also patron-client relations with landowners in Weligama, Wellipitiya, Medawatte, Galle and Matara. There is a large government tea estate to the South-east of the village which employs predominantly Sinhalese labourers many of whom live in an adjacent village.<sup>43</sup> The general pattern of employment is a combination of farming and petty trade, where-ever the opportunity presents itself. Unemployment however, is a particular problem here. During my fieldwork period there were some 40 - 50 villagers working in the Middle East all of whom reportedly obtained their positions through the one Muslim agency in Colombo. These were both married and unmarried people, predominantly women, and several others had obtained their passports and submitted applications to go.

The village has a large number of seasonal labourers, some of whom are constantly unemployed. There is consequently a very heavy tea **kadde** (shop) social scene at the tea kaddes in the main street. Many of the men spent a good part of their days here at one or another of them. There is a popular 'bucket shop' where bets are placed on

---

<sup>42</sup> The fact that 40% of the **surveyed** paddy lands (62 of a total of approximately 75 acres) are owned by outsiders indicates that land is at a premium in this agricultural village. Of the 24.5 acres owned by outsiders 6.0 acres are farmed by their Weligama owner and the remaining are let to tenants.

<sup>43</sup> There are three houses near the centre of the village but off the main road, which are used by Sinhalese people, at least two of whom are prostitutes. Their clientele is both Muslim and Sinhalese and customarily transactions take place in the adjacent forests for an unbelievably small fee (Rs2 - Rs3). The inhabitants of these three houses are related to each other and to the inhabitants of a fourth house who are Muslims. One of the women converted to Islam on the occasion of her marriage and she and her (prostitute) daughter denied any relationship between them when we interviewed them. There was only one other convert that I found in the village - an older man whose parents died when he was young and whose sisters were unable to look after him.



English and European race meetings. This feature of village life is attributed by most to the fact that unemployment is such a problem. This shop is run by a Muslim and is patronized by both Muslim and Sinhalese. Gambling is acknowledged as un-Islamic and tolerated.

Those Muslims who can will engage in a little cattle-dealing with the Sinhalese further inland, taking the animals to the Muslim butchers for slaughter. Some men manage to find casual employment during the harvesting and planting seasons, but in many cases the farmers themselves co-operate to perform these activities, leaving little chance for casual employment. Paddy agriculture also predetermines a certain amount of unity and cooperation since it is regarded as essential that all planting is undertaken within the same period and that no fields are left fallow. The latter is to counter the effect of pests and weeds breeding in the fallow fields and escaping to those nearby. Planting also of course is structured in terms of seasons and harvests. The seasonal and intermittent nature of agricultural work permits an itinerant trading occupation on the side and many farmers seek to pursue opportunities for petty trade.

Historically the village is believed to have been settled by Muslim traders forced to flee from the Portuguese on the Southern coast. In the sixteenth century King Rajasingan (Senarathan) ruled Rai-gam Korale (Ruhun) from Deundra (Dondra). There were many Muslims settled in Dondra with mosques and Ziyarams (tombs). Many of these Muslims were fishermen, cultivators and hawkers. After a Sinhala-Muslim communal riot began the Muslims were chased away. They settled in Kirinde, Meyalle, Kalutara, Dickwella, Godepitiya and Horagoda. The Horagoda settlement was founded by two males who were called by the Sinhalese "Loku Rale" and "Poddy Rale".<sup>44</sup> They moved into an area adjacent to the Sinhalese and both men converted and married Sinhalese women. The villagers built a mosque of clay and sticks (adobe) in the nineteenth century and during the Sinhala Muslim riots of 1915 it was destroyed by the Sinhalese. After the riots the British government provided the money to rebuild the mosque in stone.

---

<sup>44</sup> Rale is a term of respect- Big mister and little mister or Big Muslim and Little Muslim, according to informants.

There is a shrine in the mosque to a popular Indian saint "Nagore Andehai".<sup>45</sup>

In this village my concern was to establish what differences occurred between farming and urban Muslim communities. What was most significant was the far greater stress on education within this village. This was most striking in the case of young women who here almost as a norm, completed their secondary education to "O" Level standard and some went on further to become teachers. This stands in radical contrast to Weligama urban area where all informants estimated that 90% of girls ceased schooling at puberty. The factors cited here to account for the different attitude to female purdah and education were invariably to do with land pressures. Paddy lands cannot be continually divided up beyond a certain size and still be effectively farmed. Thus there were great pressures for many of the village children to seek employment outside the village, and within the village there was a certain level of unemployment and a commitment to piecemeal work in a number of families. All of the young women who could, were attempting to get to the Middle East to improve their lot. The idea was to build a house and furnish it to the point where attracting a non-farming husband employed elsewhere was a definite possibility. There was also a greater tolerance of 'love-marriages' in this village. Several of the young women had undertaken teacher training at nearby Alutgama where a female teacher training college had been established.<sup>46</sup> They had subsequently taken teaching jobs in Matara and nearby. Here they report that they have the opportunity to meet and contract marriages with other teachers and thus re-locate themselves outside the village by essentially living (neo-locally) outside the parental house.

There have been a number of long and treacherous disputes over land with the local Sinhalese. Some of the Muslims having inherited a share of paddy land, but engaged in trading, or married elsewhere,

---

<sup>45</sup> During a visit to the Maldives he visited Adam's Peak, Horagoda, Galle and Kirinde in Sri Lanka. In this case he is not actually buried in the shrine, rather it marks a place that he visited.

<sup>46</sup> The male training college had been built at Addalachenai in the E.P. interestingly.



have let their land to Sinhalese farmers. In the subsequent generation when a new owner inherits, or buys, the land, and wants to remove a Sinhalese farmer, severe physical violence is often the result.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the Sinhalese are employed in the nearby tea and rubber plantations but I found no evidence of any Muslim employment in this area. The Sinhalese women are of course free to work plucking tea, whereas Muslim women may not, but it seemed that none of the Muslim men, despite very high unemployment, had managed to secure work there. This is possibly a further instance of the traditional government support for, and Sinhalese engagement in, the government sector but it was not an issue I took up at the time.<sup>48</sup>

Links with the Sinhalese community are much more evident in Horagoda than in the other villages. There is a far greater influence of Sinhalese custom observable in the puberty rite where rabans are still beaten in some households. I enquired about any religious rituals associated with planting and was told that as each plant is planted they utter "Bismillah" and that at the time of harvest the first grains are taken to the mosque. In the previous generation they used to make a small "govia" (Sin - farmer) from the rice sheafs and place it inside the paddy heap to protect it. This practice has died out within the last generation, indicating further stripping away of Sinhalese cultural elements from the Muslim life.

---

<sup>47</sup> Apparently when anyone buys or sells any land that has been leased the lease-holders have inalienable rights for as long as they wish. These rights were automatically conferred in the past, not applied for. In one case a dispute arose after the sale of land between two Muslim brothers, one of whom then wanted to farm his own land. (An instance of farming a smaller piece of land being unprofitable - this brother bought out his sibling to acquire a piece of paddy land that was adequate. The Sinhalese lease-holders were not willing to hand over the land and a court case ensued. The Muslim farmer was attacked by the Sinhalese lease-holders and had acid thrown in his face and half of his skull horribly smashed in with an iron bar. His face remains badly scarred and his skull radically misshapen as a result of this cruel injury.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Two and Appendix C for further reference to this matter.

## Appendix B

### The Question of Caste.

Sinhalese society is internally divided into castes and this is reflected in the pattern of settlement within the town where specific areas are predominantly inhabited by members of the one caste. This caste-specific settlement was not entirely rigid, in my view, particularly in the central town area but was the rule in the villages surrounding the town. The Sinhalese castes in the area were the **Goyigama** (cultivators), **Karava** (fishing caste), **Durava** (carpenters, toddy tappers and formerly warriors), **Navandana** (goldsmiths/artisans), **Rada** (washing caste), **Oli** (dancers/astrologers), **Badahala** (potters), and **Berava** (exorcists).<sup>49</sup> Individuals from many of these castes were not engaged in following their traditional occupations, in particular the Goyigama, many of whom had turned to trading or were employed within the government bureaucracies. Many of the Durava had turned to fishing and a few of the Goyigama and Karava had become "entrepreneurial exorcists", relying heavily on poorly rewarded Berava ritual expertise. In one case a non-Rada woman had taken up the ritual duties of the washer caste, and some of the Navandana had become mechanics. The potters, who lived in a distinct village on the Western edge of the town were still engaged in the production of traditional household pots and a version of "tourist" pottery sold to pilgrims en route to Kataragama. The Oli, in another distinct village beyond the Eastern side of town had turned from oil production to the making of coir rope and many of the Berava still followed their traditional occupation. In general it seemed that the lower the caste, the more rigid were the residence rules, and far fewer the opportunities for an entrepreneurial shift away from caste-specific duties. In particular the Berava complained that they found it impossible to acquire land outside their village as no-one would sell it to them. The caste society continues to exist with a very real force in today's class society and continually impedes the movement of members of the lower castes into financially rewarding employment. Therefore it is the higher castes (Goyigama and Karava) who have largely entered into the trading arena. The

---

<sup>49</sup> This list was garnered purely from my observations and is not intended as exhaustive. See Ryan (1953) Leach (1979) Yalman (ibid) and McGilvray (1973, 1974, 1982) for detailed discussion of caste in Sri Lanka.



Sinhalese lower castes have barely managed to commercialize their traditional fields of employment. Caste reinforces class.

The existence of a traditional link between particular occupation and caste, is not a dominant feature of Muslim caste in Sri Lanka. Yet low caste ranking inhibits the movement of the poorest sections of the Muslim population into the arena of economic opportunity, as it does with the Sinhalese. There are five ranked "castes" among the Muslims, and all are represented in this area, but in vastly different proportions. The vast majority of the Muslims in the research area are **Nala Manichal** (the descendants of Arab traders). There are few **Moulas** (new converts), one **Osta** (barber) family, approximately fifteen **Moulana** families and one **Ande** village.<sup>50</sup> The settlement patterns of the first four groups are always theoretically mixed, their actual distribution reflecting only historical circumstance. It is only the "out-caste" Ande who are prohibited from residing in the context of the other groups and live always in caste enclaves. Despite the use of the term **shazi** (caste) I have stated that these are not to be taken as castes in a Dumontian (1980) sense, and should be understood as ranked groups. However the fact that a social ranking exists, begins my theoretical discussion. The Muslim caste groups are primarily endogamous but commensality is not restricted as with the Hindu and Sinhalese caste systems.

The Moulanas are the direct patrilineal descendants of the Prophet's daughter Fatima, and son-in-law, Ali. They are the highest ranking group. They stand in relation to "the persons of holy descent" of Swat (Barth, 1960:115), the Ashraf Saiyids and Shaiks of Uttar Pradesh, (Dumont, *ibid*:207) and the Thangals found among the Moplahs

---

<sup>50</sup> McGilvray (1989) notes the existence among East Coast Muslims of "a small elite of Maulanas" and "a small, endogamous, stigmatised group of Osta barber-circumcisers who resemble a low caste". Yet he argues that the Moors of the East Coast "lack caste distinctions", although there are some "vestiges of possible caste-related hierarchy among Moorish matriclans.. (T)oday the Moors are proud of their egalitarian religion and their common bond as Muslims" (*ibid*:195, ff1).

McGilvray (*ibid*) makes no mention of the Ande on the East Coast, and Yalman (1971) doesn't cite their existence in the Central highlands. As far as I am aware this caste only exists in the South-west coastal area from Colombo to Matara. This is not definite however as many Muslims are reluctant to discuss (and more reluctant to publish), the existence of caste, as it conflicts with egalitarian ideology.

(Mappilas) in Kerala (D'Souza, 1978:44) and the Laccadives (Forbes, *ibid*, Dube, *ibid*). In each of these social contexts it is the descendants of the Prophet who constitute the highest ranking group. Within the research area Moulanas are all Ceylon Moors. Although they hold the highest religious ranking they do not constitute a particularly wealthy group.<sup>51</sup> Many of them are in fact teachers, rather than wealthy traders. As people of the Prophet's family (Quraish) however, they are entitled to everyone's respect. Some of them are highly regarded for their religious knowledge, but this is strictly viewed as an individual matter and they are granted no moral or religious authority by virtue of their position. The Moulana families live predominantly in Galbokka and New Street, a factor which again reinforces the orthodoxy of this area vis-a-vis the surrounding villages, but there is at least one old and large family in Wellipitiya.<sup>52</sup> As the Prophet's blood is traced (post Fatima), patrilineally, the Moulana men who marry exogamously, will have children who are Moulanas, but the women who marry exogamously will not.<sup>53</sup> In Weligama considerable effort is expended in arranging endogamous marriages for Moulana women, a factor that indicates greater concern with the purity of the blood line and with bilateral kinship. This contrasts with the East coast Moulanas who are often

---

<sup>51</sup> There is one notable exception to this, a man who made his fortune in gem trading.

<sup>52</sup> In theory each of the Moulana families should hold a document called a **silsila** (chain), tracing their direct descent from Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. Only one family produced such a document which traced their ancestry back to Adam. Several of the Moulana families expressed doubts about the authenticity of other families. In particular it was stated that some of the Wellipitiya Moulanas, were in fact the original servants of Moulanas (therefore Moulas), and not **true** Moulanas (cf below).

<sup>53</sup> Moulana women are known locally by the honorific **kanne** which means virgin, and they generally maintain the strictest rules of *purdah*, in accordance with their high religious status. The use of the term *kanne* - virgin has a definite connotation of fertility. A point of contrast with the Sinhalese hierarchical system is that at puberty Sinhalese girls are understood to lose their virginity; virginity signifying wholeness and auspiciousness. In the contrasting Muslim egalitarian system, a girl at puberty is understood to become a virgin, virginity here signifying fertility and reproductive potential. See Boddy 1982 for an elaborate Sudanese argument on the social construction of virginity (fertility).



content to let their women marry exogamously. In this case it is the men alone who continually reproduce the Moulana group.

The vast majority of Muslims in the area are nala manichal ("good people"), the second highest group.<sup>54</sup> They are also all Ceylon Moors, and the majority of them are engaged in some form of trade. Their marriages are for the most part endogamous and in the cases of exogamy, all marriages are hypergamous. Within this area many marriages are between non-kin and arranged through the services of a marriage broker. Great effort is made to match prospective spouses for wealth and social position. In these marriages therefore, caste endogamy protects social rank and caste, rather than kin-group.

The third group, the Oostas, are the only group who are identified with a traditional hereditary occupation, and one which carries an inferior status.<sup>55</sup> On the East coast they are a "stigmatised" group (McGilvray, 1989:95) and the only group that may be seen "as a caste in a formal sense" (McGilvray, 1973:6). The Oosta (**naswan**) are the only "service" caste for Muslims and they perform all the female circumcisions and around fifty percent of the male circumcisions in the area.<sup>56</sup> This is the only service that Muslims ritually require.

---

<sup>54</sup> On the East coast they are **nallaarkal**, McGilvray, 1973:6.

<sup>55</sup> They argue that they are now known by the term Naswan to show that they are above other people.

<sup>56</sup> Male circumcision is ideally, a ritualized and public affair, the size of the celebration reflecting the wealth of the household. The boy is known as **sunnath mappilai** (circumcision bridegroom) and parts of the ceremonial resemble the ritual treatment of the bridegroom. Circumcision is therefore a male puberty rite, celebrating the attainment of fertile Muslim adulthood. Boys are circumcised between the ages of eight and eleven and this is performed either by the Oosta in the traditional manner in the home, or alternatively with a local anaesthetic in a Doctor's surgery. Wealth is a prime consideration in determining the extent of the celebration and therefore the manner of circumcision. For the poorer families the cheapest option is the doctor's surgery but often the cost of this (the cost of surgery plus hiring a taxi from Galle) is prohibitive, and as sons get older becomes a major financial worry. Some of the Muslim public charities (Y.M.M.A. for example) regularly set aside the money for a large number of young men to be circumcised at once. Thus circumcision celebrations for males are an indicator of class position.

Female circumcision is by contrast, a private domestic affair, performed by a female Oosta, seven or nine days after birth, when the baby's head is shaved (**aqiqa**). Female "circumcision" in this area is

In contrast to Hindu and Sinhalese castes, where washer and barber castes are required to take on pollution, there is no overt suggestion that circumcising is a polluting activity.<sup>57</sup> It is a religious requirement, the term *sunnath* suggesting both "custom" and "approved by the Prophet" (Glassé, *ibid*:381). Thus the task may also be performed by doctors. There is almost certainly however, in this cultural context, an implicit understanding that barbering is a "low" if not explicitly polluting activity. There is one Osta family in the area, living in Galbokka, who state that they are related to all other Ostas in Sri Lanka. This indicates that marriages for the Osta are strictly endogamous. One male and one female from this family (brother and sister), were still working as circumcisers, and the male ran a full-time barber-saloon also, where he dressed wounds as well as cut hair and shaved clients. The ritual labour of these two was sufficient to service the entire community's needs. The children in the family have all taken up other employment, and do not intend to work as circumcisers, as income from this traditional occupation is deemed insufficient.<sup>58</sup> This group originally undertook the purificatory washing of corpses before burial but this task has since been left to the Ande out-castes - the lowest group.<sup>59</sup>

---

primarily symbolic, entailing the extraction of a single drop of blood from the clitoral hood. Female circumcision is accompanied by a few ritual dishes of food. The celebration in this case is the new baby's Muslim status, as the purpose of the circumcision itself is widely held to be to "curb her sexual appetite" rather than purify her in a religious sense. Female circumcision is believed to be a religious act, though most people will state that it is not in the Qur'an, but is followed by custom.

<sup>57</sup> All Muslims however, regularly bury any nail parings or removed body hair. In the context of the baby's head-shaving the hair is explicitly removed because it has been polluted by contact with the mother's birth canal and is placed in a small bowl of turmeric water when removed by the Osta. Its weight "in silver" is symbolically given to the Osta in the form of a small coin which is also placed in the bowl.

<sup>58</sup> In 1986 the female Osta could expect twenty Rupees plus a ritual gift of food, for her services from a middle class household. Her brother would get between Rs50/- and Rs100/- and would be entitled to one of the sabans from the feast.

<sup>59</sup> There is no explicit ideology of death pollution and no ideological requirement within Islam for this task to be performed by a ritual specialist.



The fourth group are the Moulas, recently converted Muslims (from Arabic *mawla* - the client of an Arab with second class status). They generally retain their lower status for about three generations, after which time they slide into the nala manichal group. This is not ever stated as an explicit facet of the ideology, rather it reflects the length of people's memories. Moulas also marry endogamously. If he is particularly wealthy a Moula male will have no trouble finding a spouse amongst the poorer women of the nala manichal group. Very few Moulas will openly state that they are so, but others will readily identify them. Some social ostracism is attached to a marriage contracted with this group and there may be subsequent difficulty in finding spouses for the children of such marriages. However it is true that if a comparatively wealthy male of the nala manichal group marries a newly converted Sinhalese woman then the social cost will not be great. With large dowries for his daughters he will have no problems marrying them to other nala manichal. All the cases of Moula marriage that I heard of were those that involved Muslim males and converted wives.<sup>60</sup> I heard of no case in which a Muslim woman married a converted man. Hypergamy is again the issue and patrilineal bloodlines are at stake. An additional problem for the Moula group, is that many Moulas actually are converted through the process of being the servants of wealthy Muslim families.<sup>61</sup>

The fifth group are known as *Ande walfawel* (depend living) or *ande manichal* (depend people).<sup>62</sup> The Ande are an out-caste group with a

---

<sup>60</sup> One young man who had, due to his father's early death, become the head of the family and its chief economic support, arranged to marry a Moula woman, the daughter of a converted Hindu. He went ahead with his plans despite the vigorous objections of his mother and sisters. He argued that the Moula/Nala Manichal distinction made no difference to him, the idea of castes was against the religion and what was more, his own family had only converted from Hinduism six generations ago.

<sup>61</sup> The children of Indian Tamil plantation workers are 'adopted' as servants and subsequently raised as Muslims. These children are moulas; they are not formally educated but the Muslim family assumes the responsibility of marrying them.

<sup>62</sup> The term Ande is not polite and never used when a member of the group is present.

high number of beggars. All Ande marriages are endogamous and there is a higher than usual tendency to find a spouse from another village and very few marriages take place between two people who already live there. The low status of this group is commonly attributed to the fact that begging is such a common practice here and is regarded by all Muslims as un-Islamic. Significantly their low class-status (and grinding poverty), and Indian origins are never referred to.

The question of caste in a Muslim egalitarian community presents an apparent contradiction and indeed is a constant point of tension within the community. I have argued that this ranking is not to be read as "caste", nor the system as a "caste-system" along the lines of Dumont's (ibid) argument concerning Hindu caste; a system structured around an internal hierarchical relation borne of the opposition of pure and impure. In fact if we examine the caste groups of the South coast Muslims they do not immediately suggest the operation of a system based on a common principle at all. As Barth argues for the Sunni Pathans of Swat, there is

no ritual system in terms of which the groups are compared or ordered with respect to one another (ibid:115).

The Swat Pathans however are grouped largely by occupation whereas in Weligama there is no immediately apparent logic which applies to all the groups. The various groups seem to find their *raison d'être* in a number of different principles (ethnicity, conversion, occupation) and this suggests an historical conglomeration of groups whose internal ranking may be derived perhaps from class processes.<sup>63</sup> Is this nothing more than a transformation of the Hindu model of caste which has arisen within a community located in the pan-Indian region? There is a principle which becomes evident however when we examine the movement within the groups and the question of hypergamy and the ideology of blood. This is a particular religious construction which determines the status of the group in relation to its distance from the Prophet himself.

"Caste" ranking may be viewed as basically one principle related to a conception of patrilineal descent. Yalman argued that caste required **bilateral** descent, even if the local kinship structure was

---

<sup>63</sup> See Kolenda (1978:23-36) for a similar argument about the origins of caste in India.



patrilineal or matrilineal. In the Muslim case, it is implicit that notions of bilateral descent are important - since there is a tendency towards endogamy among the stratified groups. However, it is also evident that descent through males is the determining, or superior religious value. The groups are ranked according to the **quality** of male, Islamic blood - that is distance from its (ancestral) origin. Three of the groups Moulanas (I), Nala Manichal (II) and Moulas (IV) are ordered on a continuum with reference to their Islamic rank. First the people of the Prophet's family, followed by those who trace their origins to the lands of the Middle east through Arab traders and claim long-standing belief in Islam. The converted group owe their lower status (IV) to their recent conversion to the religion (either 'adopted' servants or former Hindu or Buddhist wives of nala manichal). The Osta group are believed to be Muslims of long-standing but they are from India (possibly Kerala) and in India their occupation was that of a low caste. Their endogamy has prevented them from becoming Nala Manichal. The Ande (V) are out-castes (banished from the Kandyan kingdom and with South Indian origins maintained in their myth of origin) who have until recently all followed an occupation which has been outlawed by Islam.<sup>64</sup>

The higher the rank, the closer in **substantive** terms to the Islamic source - Muhammad himself. Thus the relationship between Islam, saintly blood, and patrilineal descent form one **principle**. Endogamy reinforces the group boundaries and protects blood purity. By continually marrying within the group one reproduces ones 'Islamicness'. This is proved by the eventual possibility of "hypergamy" by some of the Moulas, after sufficiently building up enough Islamic blood. They can **increase** their Muslim purity and the concentration of "sacred" Muslim blood, within a group, through marriage. This is a real increase in **substance**, so much so that the Moula can **become** a Nala Manichal. This is ideologically impossible in an hierarchical caste system, precisely because caste purity does not rest, basically, on the **quantity and quality** of substance, but almost solely on relations. A Hindu person cannot **increase** in purity

---

<sup>64</sup> A further speculative point but in line with the logic . is the fact that the Osta (if they prove to be from Kerala) will rate higher than the Ande from Madurai due to the earlier conversion of that area (Southwest coast) and the fact that it had an earlier involvement with Arab traders and the Arab world.

during life, this is certainly true of caste status and purity. Endogamy in the Hindu caste system is a practice aimed at maintaining purity and difference, not at increasing purity and Islamic identity. (The latter is just not possible in caste).

Therefore we are alerted to a fundamental point about Muslim 'caste' or this particular Muslim 'caste system'. There are fundamental differences in the constitution of the individual in hierarchical and egalitarian systems. The individual within the egalitarian system is capable of self-transformation. By this I do not mean a change in caste status, (always a social but not an ideological possibility within the pan-Indian system), but a radical transformation of the self.



## Appendix C

### Muslim Dominance of Trade.

In a survey conducted in 1985 it was found that of a total of 429 business outlets in the town, 201 (46.85%) were controlled by Muslims, 226 (52.68%) were controlled by Sinhalese and 2 (0.46%) were controlled by Tamils.<sup>65</sup> Business outlets were divided into five categories according to their size. These categories ranged from (A) stall, (B) small business, (C) average business, (D) large business, and (E) industry.<sup>66</sup>

The picture of Muslim dominance is further strengthened when we consider the relative percentages of those controlling the smallest and largest outlets. In the smallest category (A - stalls), of a total of eleven stalls, only one stall (9.09%) was run by Muslims, one (9.09%) was run by Tamils and nine (81.81%) were run by Sinhalese. In contrast to this, in the largest category (E - industry), of a total of six industries, five (83.33%) were run by Muslims and only one (16.66%) run by Sinhalese. In the intervening categories the relative percentages are outlined in Table C.1.

---

<sup>65</sup> This survey was explicitly concerned with shops and stalls of a permanent nature and did not include any of the Sinhalese or Muslim, itinerant door to door hawkers of fish, vegetables, household items, sweets and trinkets. It further did not include the vegetable stall-holders in either the central market (approx 12 stalls) or the smaller market (2 stalls), of whom all but one were Sinhalese. Also excluded was the town's fishing industry which is entirely in the hands of the Sinhalese. Taking these considerations into account, my results diminish to some extent the picture of Sinhalese economic engagement within the town. However the survey is an accurate indication of the respective percentages of Sinhalese and Muslim populations engaged in all other wholesale and retail trade.

<sup>66</sup> A stall (A) was either a small roadside operation which was generally housed in a wooden shelter or a market stall. A small business (B) was housed in a small shop and in most cases serviced by a single employee (or the owner) at any one time. An average business (C) was housed in a larger shop and required two or more employees. A large business generally had several employees under the direction of a manager and was housed in a large and well-provisioned shop. The category (E) Industry refers to a business which was oriented towards wholesale operations and which reflected substantial capital investment in machinery, (i.e. a rice or spice mill operation, a lumber operation or a knitting operation) even though the latter functioned as a cottage industry with women doing "outwork".

Table C.1

Business Ownership by Ethnic Group.					
Business Size		Total No	Muslim	Sinhalese	Tamil
A	Stall	11	9.09%	81.81%	9.09%
B	Small	67	43.28%	56.71%	-
C	Average	272	48.52%	51.1%	0.36%
D	Large	73	46.57%	53.42%	-
E	Industry	6	83.33%	16.66%	-

When businesses were further classified as to their type the dominance of either Muslims or Sinhalese in particular trades became apparent. In particular the Muslims dominated the highly lucrative Gem (Jewellery) and Textile trades.<sup>67</sup>

There were a total of 22 jewellery outlets which provided the gold ear-rings, necklaces, (*thali* - a marriage ornament of Tamil Hindu and Muslim women), bracelets and rings which are an essential feature of the puberty and marriage rituals of both the Muslims and Sinhalese and form part of the dowry of all young women. Twenty of these (90.90%) are run by Muslims while only two (9.09%) are run by Sinhalese. The gem and jewellery trade has been a traditional Muslim

<sup>67</sup> The owners of a number of businesses (66) were asked to give an estimate of their weekly takings. While some were reluctant to do so, for taxation reasons, the results clearly indicate that the highest returns are to be found in the Gem trade.

Weekly Takings: 66 Businesses in Weligama.

Business	Questioned	No Response	Rs 5000 or less,	Rs 6-30,000
Grocery	35	13 (37%)	22 (63%)	-
Textiles	15	3 (20%)	9 (60%)	3 (20%)
Hardware	8	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	2 (25%)
Gems	8	3 (37.5%)	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)



monopoly and this is reflected in Weligama where although the Muslims are a minority they control the major part of this trade.<sup>68</sup>

In the textile trade also, the Muslims clearly dominate though not to such a striking degree. There were a total of 38 textile shops and 26 (68.42%) of these were run by Muslims and 12 (41.57%) were run by Sinhalese. In contrast to this there were a far greater number of Sinhalese than Muslim tailors. There were 19 tailoring businesses in the town and the Muslims ran only 2 (10.52%) and the Sinhalese ran 17 (89.47%). The clothing worn by both Muslims and Sinhalese in the town is virtually the same. All Muslim and Sinhalese married women wear saris (although only Muslim women pull part of the sari length up to cover their heads), and all the men wear shirts made by the local tailors, and sarongs.<sup>69</sup> The only significant distinction is found in the clothing of unmarried women. Very young girls of both communities groups are commonly clothed in dresses available from all the textile shops. However while young Sinhalese women continue to wear dresses after puberty, young Muslim women as they approach puberty begin to wear long trousers with their white school uniforms. After puberty when the vast majority of young Muslim women are confined to their houses they wear the long narrow trousers and dresses known as **salwar** or **punjabi** suits and the **churidars** (shawls)

---

<sup>68</sup> Most of the gem and jewellery shops in Weligama deal primarily in gold jewellery rather than gems. This contrasts with the Galle Fort area for instance where many of the Muslim gem traders are almost wholly engaged in the polishing, grading and sale of sapphires and rubies and other semi-precious stones. The owners of the Weligama stores however see themselves as Gem Traders, engaged in a trade which has symbolic significance and links them clearly to the original Arab traders who came to the island for its gems and spices. The majority of the gem and jewellery shops are located in the Galbokka area, a fact which underlines both the Muslim dominance of this trade and through its symbolic significance to Muslims, the status of this area as the heart of orthodox Muslim settlement within the town.

<sup>69</sup> Both Sinhalese and Muslim men commonly wear and exhibit a preference for white sarongs, particularly on formal occasions. There are however distinct ethnic preferences expressed in the patterns of the coloured sarongs worn by the men on a day to day basis. In particular the batik patterned sarongs were rarely worn by the Sinhalese and the Muslims were reported to express a preference for smaller checked patterns.

with which they cover their breasts.<sup>70</sup> Thus although both groups require equally textile shops and the services of tailors, the **Muslims** dominate the purely **trading** side of community clothing needs and the **Sinhalese** dominate the **service** side.

This distinction between the trading and service sides of different areas of the economy is again reflected in the respective engagement of Muslims and Sinhalese in the health field. There are eight pharmacies in the town which supply a vast array of Western allopathic drugs, available over the counter and including a number that have been banned in the West.<sup>71</sup> There are a total of eight pharmacies in the town and 5 (62.5%) are in Muslim hands and 3 (37.5%) are controlled by Sinhalese. On the other hand in the Doctor/Ayurvedic/Apothecary, professional service side of this field, of a total of 15 outlets there are four (26.6%) outlets in Muslim hands and 11 (73.33%) operated by Sinhalese.<sup>72</sup> In the case of

---

<sup>70</sup> Muslim women of the last generation, began to wear saris in the home when they reached puberty, but this is now reserved until marriage. In fact many of today's young women will continue to wear their salwar and punjabi suits around the house after marriage as they claim they are more comfortable. Sinhalese women also may be seen wearing dresses after marriage, but this was in my observation confined to the poorer sections of the community and restricted to household and every-day wear, never on ritual occasions.

<sup>71</sup> The birth control agent Depo-Provera is an example. Although all drugs are available without prescription, many customers arrive with small "prescriptions" supplied by their doctors and the pharmacists commonly label the small envelopes of pills or bottles of linctus with the name of the patient and the dosage instructions. Formal pharmaceutical training is available but there is no official requirement for a "pharmacist" to undertake any formal training before opening and running a pharmacy. Pharmacies also carry a sizeable range of grocery items as well.

<sup>72</sup> There are no Western trained Muslim doctors in the town and the Muslim women either patronise a Sinhalese female doctor locally, or travel to Matara. A government hospital located at the far Western end of the town is available to both communities, and recently a new maternity hospital, for both communities, was established in Galbokka. Formerly there were three government mid-wives in the town who took care of the majority of births but a trend towards hospital births and the establishment of the maternity hospital has decreased the need for them. One of these mid-wives, a Sinhalese Christian woman, who was formerly responsible for the primarily Muslim Galbokka and New Street areas, continued to operate on a private basis, visiting new mother and child in the home and administering the ritual herbal bath that Muslim women take on the 40th day after parturition.



the "Fancy Goods" or Gift shops; sellers of glass and ceramic ware, the Muslims again held a dominant position. Of a total of 16 shops there were 11 (68.75%) owned by Muslims and 5 (31.25%) owned by Sinhalese.

Overall, the largest number of businesses were connected with the grocery trade and included grocery stores, vegetable and fruit outlets, grinding mills, wholesale grocery outlets and butchers. Of a total of 153 grocery outlets the Muslims controlled 71 (46.40%), Tamils one outlet (0.65%) and the Sinhalese 81 (52.94%). This indicates that a certain proportion of the Sinhalese majority purchase their groceries from Muslim tradesmen. Included in this category were 22 'Hotels' (restaurants), which sell both hot food and "lunch-packets". Many of those who are working in Weligama but who live elsewhere on the island, and large numbers of people travelling through the town, regularly dine in these establishments. Fourteen Hotels were run by Muslims (63.63%) and only eight by Sinhalese (36.36%), a figure which reflects an extensive Sinhalese patronage of Muslim establishments and a lack of Sinhalese objections to eating food cooked by Muslims.<sup>73</sup>

The Hardware industry is the only field in which both groups are equally represented with each group running 12 outlets (50%) each. Hardware in this instance refers to building materials, cement and roofing tiles, timber and ironworks. The Sinhalese are the only professional builders in the town and are employed to build the houses of the Muslims also. Many of the poorer Muslims however undertake to build their own homes, (particularly if they have recently returned from the Middle East) and commonly, quite major household repairs and house-painting are undertaken by the householders themselves. Two of these hardware outlets are timber stores and one is run by a Muslim who employs an entirely Sinhalese

---

<sup>73</sup> There is clearly no caste factor evident here in taking food from another group. Muslims in the island would also be happy to eat in establishments run by Sinhalese (and Tamils) since they know that all beef in the island is killed by Muslims and is therefore **halal**. Locally the Muslims had a reputation as better cooks, a fact which is probably related to their tendency to consume more meat than the Sinhalese, and generally a more expensive diet.

labour force.<sup>74</sup> This traditional interest of the Sinhalese in the timber industry is reflected in the ownership of furniture stores where five are run by Sinhalese with only one in the hands of a Muslim. In the Electrical business also their respective representation is almost even, with eight shops owned by Muslims and seven by Sinhalese. This category of outlets included the retail sale of radios, cassettes, and electrical household goods. One further outlet recharged the car batteries used in many homes as their only source of electricity.

I have drawn a loose distinction between the participation of Muslims and Sinhalese, in the purely entrepreneurial and the service sides, of trading activity within the local economy. The Muslims are far more likely to be engaged in the purely entrepreneurial activity while the Sinhalese are represented in both sides. In the Motor industry there are five Garages or Mechanical Service centres and four are run by Sinhalese while only one is run by a Muslim. Yet in the case of the three Spare Parts shops for tyres, Tractor Parts and Motor Parts, two are owned by Muslims and one by Sinhalese. In the case of the Printing shops within the town, where the obligatory sets of wedding invitations and cards that are used by both communities are printed, the ownership reflects the actual proportions of the population. Of a total of four printers three are Sinhalese and only one is Muslim. In the case of the cycle shops also, the Muslims were in a dominant position. With bicycles constituting the town's most important form of personal transport there were a total of 15 shops. The Muslims owned 11 (73.33%) of them and the Sinhalese owned 4 (26.66%).

This distinction between trade and professional service reflects three distinct but related factors. The first is a traditional Muslim preference for trade itself; the second is the traditionally caste based structure of Sinhalese society; and the third, which emerges from the second is, specific community needs. There are three funeral parlours in the town catering exclusively to the Sinhalese population, while the Muslims bury their dead quickly and through the aegis of the mosque. Both laundries in the town are also owned and

---

<sup>74</sup> The Sinhalese **Durava** caste, who are well represented in the town traditionally work with coconut trees and in the lumber business.



run by the Sinhalese although they cater to a mixed clientele. I am not aware if these people are members of the traditional Sinhalese Rada (washers) caste but it is quite likely.<sup>75</sup>

Members of both communities have displayed a certain aptitude for entrepreneurial activity and there are increasing numbers of Sinhalese engaged in trading within the town. Thus in the case of Kapuwatta for instance, an entirely Muslim village, there is a laundry which is owned and operated by a Sinhalese man from nearby Horagoda. In Weligama there are five Picture Framers who do comparatively little picture framing but sell small posters of the Buddha and a vast array of Gods in the Sinhalese and Hindu pantheons. Almost every Buddhist household has a few of these posters in the house, often located by a small household altar where a lamp is lit for household worship. The three largest of these businesses are owned by Sinhalese but the two smallest are run by Muslims and have a clientele which is 99% Sinhalese.<sup>76</sup>

A further aspect of the town's economy which is of great significance is the extent of government support which is offered to the local Sinhalese population. There are a number of government Co-operatives in the town all of which are exclusively in the hands of the Sinhalese. There are seven grocery co-operatives which operate as retail outlets and the venue for redeeming the rice coupons which

---

<sup>75</sup> There is a Rada village located at the Western end of town in an area renowned for its pure water and where there is a large communal well used by people of the town for bathing. People of this village take in washing on a routine basis as well as providing the **piriwatta** or pure cloths required by the Sinhalese for ritual purposes, such as puberty and exorcisms (Russell, p.c.). There is no similar Muslim requirement for ritually pure cloth predicated on the action of ritual/caste specialists. Pure cloths in a Muslim household are purified simply by washing them as water itself is the purificatory agent.

<sup>76</sup> Muslims have strong ideological objections to any attempts to objectify Allah or the Prophet Muhammad. A few of the most orthodox within the town extend this to objectification in general, and ban photographs of people and the watching of television. This position however has almost no common support, with most people considering this interpretation unwarranted and untenable. Photographs of women who are in purdah however, are not shown to anybody who would not have the right to see his woman in person. In their houses Muslims will often display ornate calendars with pictures of the Ka'bah in Mecca, or small posters of Arabic verses from the Qur'an but the latter are generally found in the Muslim bookshops.

many of the poorer families depend on.<sup>77</sup> There are also two Co-operative textile shops, one Co-operative Pharmacy, one Co-operative hardware store and one Government Training school for tailors. These outlets have all been included in the data above, and they act to inflate Sinhalese participation in the respective percentages of trade, as indications of ethnic entrepreneurial engagement.

Another field where the coalition of Sinhalese government and Sinhalese entrepreneurial activity is strikingly evident is the Gambling economy. There were two specific areas of gambling; one was the private sector Betting shops (known as Bucket shops), where it was possible to place bets on the horse-races in Singapore and the Middle East, and the other were the outlets for the Government run Lotteries. There were a total of 14 outlets for the horse-racing bets and of these nine (64.28%) were run by Muslims and five (35.71%) run by Sinhalese. All ten outlets for the Government Lotteries were run by Sinhalese. The patronage of both Lottery and Betting outlets was overwhelmingly Sinhalese.<sup>78</sup>

#### **The Structure of Trade.**

Given the interspersed nature of ethnic settlement throughout the town area and the location of the market and commercial area in the centre, all businesses (with the exception of specialist outlets, funeral parlours, butchers, betting outlets) report a mixed clientele. This is no doubt due in part, to the fact that all shops in any particular category, carry the same basic range of goods. Prices may vary a little from one shop to another but owners are careful not to be too competitive by dropping their prices drastically. When a young Muslim man opened a new pharmacy in Station Road, between another two already established (one Muslim and one Sinhalese) he was very careful to line up his prices exactly with

---

<sup>77</sup> They are supplied from the large Co-operative store, located near the Railway Station which has a storage capacity of ten metric tonnes and at the time generally carried a stock of five tonnes valued at five million Rupees.

<sup>78</sup> Two Muslim Betting shops run by Muslims reported that their patronage was 80% Sinhalese/20% Muslim and 90% Sinhalese/10% Muslim respectively. Several informants reported that gambling was prohibited by Islam but this clearly did not extend to conducting a business based on the gambling tendencies of others. This is another area in which Muslim participation in the local economy is purely entrepreneurial.



those of the other two.<sup>79</sup> There are never any sales of any description, nor any conception of shifting stock, in fact the reverse principle applies. During the periods of Sinhalese New Year and Ramazan, when everybody who can afford it seeks to acquire a new set of clothing, the prices are uniformly raised.

A similar situation may be observed in the cases of some of the smaller gem and jewellery shops which also function as antique shops selling old coins and jewellery. There is an almost non-existent local market for the latter goods and merchants would hope to sell these items either to foreign tourists or visiting Sinhalese and Muslim collectors. With the collapse of the tourist market (particularly in this area) the chances of sales were almost nil. Despite this situation however the merchant would rather wait for a "big killing" than attempt to sell more goods at lower prices. In many cases these smaller shops formed only part of a family's economic interests. Given the very low economic returns in such ventures it is evident that their significance to the families involved rests in the **activity** rather than the **returns** of such a trade. Many Muslims who are employed in day-time jobs (teaching for example) or who have retired, will seek to have a small shop that they open at night, or some form of business that they operate from

---

<sup>79</sup> He also employed a Sinhalese pharmacy assistant from the nearby Sinhalese pharmacy at the request of its owner.

home.<sup>80</sup> If the opportunity to trade ever presents itself a Muslim will invariably take it up.

The ideal employment-history of a young Muslim male in this area, is a period of employment as a salesman in another merchant's shop, followed by the establishment of his own business. Alternatively he may become a textile hawker, travelling and selling textiles in the van of a textile merchant, who himself runs a large textile store or has a domestic industry making socks and baby-clothes. If the family is already well established in business he may first find employment in the family business and later take it over, or establish another outlet, with financial assistance from his father. This however, depends very much on the size of the original family business, and the number of sons in a family. There were many instances where the father ran a small business in the town and where the son found employment elsewhere in the island, returning home once a week, or in most cases, once a month.

In each trade, more than 50% of the merchants had first been employed as salesmen or hawkers in the same field of business, though not the same shop. However in the percentages of those listed as initially engaged in other trades, there were two textile merchants, who had been employed in other fields before entering the textile trade, whose fathers were textile merchants. Two of the grocery merchants

---

<sup>80</sup> One man who had lived in quite meagre circumstances with his large family in a **cadjan** (coconut thatch) hut had sought to support them on his salary as a bus conductor for the Ceylon Transport Board. When his sons grew up two of them managed to spend extended periods of time employed in the Middle East. They bought land and built a large new family home and furnished it complete with television and video. Then the eldest son bought more land nearby and built and furnished a new home for himself and his wife. As she is a graduate, employed as a teacher in a school some distance away, and as he remains temporarily in the Middle East, neither of them currently live there. The daughter of the family also contracted an excellent marriage to a Colombo man who had also spent time working in the Middle East. The family then bought a private bus and employed a driver, and hoped to supplement their family income from this lucrative source. When the father retired he opened a very small shop in a hut near his home, to service a nearby housing estate. The younger women of the extended household spent some time each week packing coffee into small plastic packets for sale there. The youngest son has since found employment in the Middle East. There is no need for the father to work as a trader and the returns from his small business are undoubtedly small. However, having retired, and with his sons doing so well, he is now finally in a position to pursue a life of trade.



had been teachers initially, turning to the grocery trade upon retirement. One of the gem merchants also who had no previous employment history had been set up in the gem business by his father who was previously a textile merchant, and who had now come to work with his son as a gem trader.

Table C.2

Muslim Traders Previous Occupations					
Trade	No.	Same Trade	Other Trade	No Prev Emp	N/A
Grocery	25	52%	36%	8%	8%
Textiles	12	75%	25%	-	-
Gems	6	50%	16.6%	33.3%	-

On the occasion of his marriage a young man may take over his wife's father's business, on a few occasions having married the owner's daughter. In more cases though it appeared that the young man would inherit his own father's business, though there was one instance in which a man inherited his Mother's Brother's business.<sup>81</sup>

Sinhalese-Muslim relations within the town are for the most part cordial and the Muslims have not generally sought extensive representation on the Urban Council, leaving control of local politics in the hands of the Sinhalese. There are numerous ways in which the communities are dependent upon one another. Two of these mentioned above are the provision of meat and fish within the town. With only two jewellery shops in Sinhalese hands most gem businesses report a Sinhalese clientele in excess of 50% (some as high as 90%). The employment of a Sinhalese member of staff in a predominantly Muslim business and vice versa is not uncommon.

---

<sup>81</sup> In the Muslim society of Weligama the houses belong to the women and form an essential part of a daughter's dowry upon marriage, along with (in the case of wealthier families) a considerable cash payment and items of gold jewellery. The business interests of a family however are handed from father to son.

Households too, often depend on Sinhalese specializations in the fields of house-building and also coconut plucking. In the purely trading field however where Muslims and Sinhalese are in direct competition frictions sometimes do arise. I have cited above the extensive government support offered to sections of the Sinhalese community through the total Sinhalese control of the Co-operative and Lottery outlets. There are also some who believe that the agencies of the government directly seek to subvert a traditional Muslim dominance of trade within the town and increase, by unfair means the extent of Sinhalese participation. One Muslim informant was quite vocal on this issue and stated that ..

"Earlier all the wholesale business was in the hands of the Muslims in Weligama. In the last twenty years however, it has decreased rapidly. I think that there is a group which helps the Sinhalese to buy Muslim shops, or it may be the Urban Council or government banks which helps them to do it. If, due to poverty, Muslims let their shops to a Sinhalese business, they find it extremely difficult to get them back. The Sinhalese don't pay any rent to the Muslims directly but pay five or seven Rupees a month to the Urban Council. There are numerous cases like this and the Police and the government agencies consistently protect this Sinhalese denial of Muslim rights."

With regard to Weligama itself I heard no similar Sinhalese complaint with regard to the Muslim domination of business within the town but there was a general Sinhalese perception that the Muslims were a wealthy community. In nearby Ahangama however, a Sinhalese stallholder in the market area reported that they had "kept the Muslims out of Ahangama."

There is a clear distinction between Muslim dominance of the purely entrepreneurial side of business within the town and a Sinhalese dominance in the professional service side of the economy. This situation is not static and the Sinhalese are increasingly engaged in the entrepreneurial side as well. However the reverse is not the case, we do not find Muslims moving into the service sector in significant numbers. The basis of this distinction may be traced on the one hand, to the Sinhalese caste system, and on other, to the far earlier entrance of the Muslims into the trading economy. The continued Muslim preference to engage wherever possible in the practice of trade reflects the ideological value of living the life of a trader.



# GLOSSARY

adat	custom	hafiz	pilgrimage to Mecca
adatrecht	Indonesian customary laws	hajj	one who has memorized
alathi	ritual act of blessing (Hindu)	Hakkia	the Qur'an
Allawiyia	a tariqa / Sufi order	halal	Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca
alim	religious scholar (pl. ulema)	Halara	a tariqa
ande	outcaste	haram	permitted
aqiqa	head-shaving	hawl	rathib of the Shasuliah tariqa
ar	vow		sacred / forbidden
avaru	residential wards		pool of water for ablutions
awliya	saints (plural lit - friend or patron, singular - wali)	Id ul-Fitr	the feast of breaking the fast
Asar	mid-afternoon prayer period	Id ul-Azha	the feast of sacrifice
azan	the call to prayer	'ifrit	demon / jinn
Badahala	Sinhalese potters caste	ihram	pilgrim dress
badda	caste based system of public service	imam	prayer-leader
Bara'at	Islamic ritual on the 15 <sup>th</sup> Shaban	Isha	evening prayer period
baraka	grace	jamath / jamaat	council / electorate
Berava	Sinhalese exorcist caste	Jaziratul Yaqut	Island of Rubies -
binna	matrilocal marriage		Arabic term for Ceylon
bodddhisatva	Sinhalese	Jumma	Friday
	Buddha to be		
cadjan	woven coconut thatch	kadutham	marriage register
cadju	cashew	kafan	burial cloth
cartazes	Portuguese bills of permission to trade	kaikuli	cash sum given to the groom
chonahan	Ceylon Moor	kalifa / khalifah	a spiritual successor
chammankaran	Coast Moor	Kalimah	profession of faith / lit. "the word"
churidar	shawl	kanduri	mosque feast
Culuvamsa	one of the Sinhalese chronicles of kingship	kanne	virgin - honourific used for Moulana women
cungee	rice gruel	kapa	central pole of village ritual
dalada	Buddha's tooth	karamat	miracle / "acts of generosity"
Dalada Maligawa	Temple of the Tooth	Karava	Sinhalese fishing caste
debiha	fulfillment of vow	khateeb / khatib	preacher
deega	patrilocal marriage	khattam	funeral prayers
	Sinhalese	khutbah	sermon
dholaw	sedan-chair	kiri-pol	milk coconut
din	religion	Koya	highest caste in Lakshadweep Islands
diyadada	water taxes	kolkali	stick-fighting / martial art
diyadedum	water taxes	kudu	ceremonial structure
Durava	Sinhalese caste (carpenters/ toddy-tappers)	kulappaaduthal	ritual washing of corpse
faqir	holy man / lit. "a poor man"	kulippaaddupavar	corpse washers
fatiha	opening verse of Qur'an	kuti	East coast matrilineal clan
gama	village	Lai Bandaras	Muslims from Karachi coast
gammaduva	village ceremonial	Laylat al-Qadr	"Night of Power"
goda	place	lebbe / lebbes	preacher, and an honourific
Goyigama	Sinhalese cultivating caste	le keliya	stick-fighting / martial art
govia	farmer	Luhar	mid-day prayer period
govikula	highest caste in Kandyan kingdom		
gundras	Maldivian barque (sailing vessel)	machan	cross cousin (male)
		madhhab	school of jurisprudence
hadjiar	one who has completed the	madrasa	Qur'an school
		Maghrib	sunset prayer period
		Maha	agricultural season - Sept to Jan
		maha-pillai	great accountant/ great child
		mahal	daughter
		mahan	son

Mahavamsa	one of the Sinhalese chronicles of kingship	niyaath	contract
mahr	symbolic payment given to the bride by groom	niyaz	offering which fulfils an earlier vow
mainee	cross cousin (female)	nombu	blessed food (Persian)
Malayalam	language of Kerala		fasting
Malayali	adjective from Malayalam	Oli	Sinhalese caste (dancers/ astrologers)
Malmi	Lakshadweep Islands caste	Osta	Muslim barber caste
mani	type of pearl found in Ceylon		
Manik Ganga	Gem River	paal	milk
manjal	turmeric	pacchoru	milk rice
Mapillai	bridegroom	palli	mosque
Mappilla	a person from the Kerala area	palli-koodam	Qur'an school (lit. mosque-school)
marrakkalaha	Moors	palliya-jamaat	mosque council
marrakar	Moors	pandal	throne
marikkars	Mappilas from the Kerala coast	pari-yari	native physician
marumahan	elder brother's son	pavadai	one of seven cloths used to wrap a Muslim corpse
marumakkathayam	customary laws in Lakshadweep islands	perahera	procession
masjid	mosque	pesantiren	Qur'an schools (Malay)
mawsim	fixed season	pettah	bazaar
Melacheri	Lakshadweep Islands	pir	saint
	lowest caste	piriwatta	pure cloth
mihrab	niche indicating direction of Mecca	pola	market
minbar	pulpit	pon	bride
miswak (mishwak)	tooth-brush made from a frayed twig	ponkal / pongal	milk rice
mizan	balance scale represented by two wooden boards	pooran kudi	centipede flag (used at Kalmunai mosque)
mokkada	to veil with the end of a sari	pottani	bundle of textiles
moudin	(muazzin) calls the faithful to prayer	Qaddirria	Qadiriyyah -a tariqa - Sufi order
moula	convert to Islam (Ar. Mawla - client)	Qazi	religious courts
moulana	descendent of the Prophet	qiblah	direction of Mecca
moulavi	religious scholar (male)	qutb	axis / pole
moulavia	religious scholar (female)		
mowlood	recital / story of the Prophet or a Muslim saint	Rada	Sinhalese washer caste
muazzin	calls the faithful to prayer	rajakariya	system of compulsory service to the king
mudalali	businessman	Rajavaliya	one of the Sinhalese chronicles of kingship
mudaliperuva	high bureaucrats	rakat	cycle of sacred words
muhamoodi	one of seven cloths used to wrap a Muslim corpse	Ramazan	month of fasting (Ramadan)
mukaru	Muslim gem miners	rathib	recital of saints life-story
murid	disciple	Rifai / Rifai'iyya	a tariqa / Sufi order
mutkuda	Sinhalese king's pearl umbrella	saban	large ritual bowl
		saddai	three of seven cloths used to wrap a Muslim corpse
nalla manichal	good people/ Muslim caste	sahalappaddi	bond between two men who have married sisters
nallaarkal	Osta - barber caste	salat	prayer
namad-ge	prayer house	samadhi	deep meditative trance
namaz	prayer	sammamkaras	Coast Moor
nana	elder brother	sampan	boat
Naqshabandia	a tariqa	sanyasi	Hindu renouncer
naswan	Osta - barber caste	Sarandib	island of Sri Lanka
nershey	offering which fulfills an earlier vow	saum	fasting
Nikah	signing of the marriage		



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdullah, Taufik 1966 Adat and Islam: an examination of a conflict in Minangkabau. *Indonesia*. (Ithaca) 2:1-24.
- Abeyasinghe, T.B.H. 1986 Muslims in Sri Lanka in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp129-145).
- Aggarwal, Partap C. 1978 Caste Hierarchy in a Meo Village of Rajasthan. In Imtiaz Ahmad ed., *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:South Asia Books..
- Ahmad, Aziz 1969 *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*. *Islamic Surveys* 7. Edinburgh:University Press.
- Ahmad, Imtiaz ed., 1976 *Family, Kinship and Marriage Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:Manohar.
- 1978 *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:South Asia Books.
- 1981 *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:Manohar.
- Ahmed, Akbar, S 1991 Post-modernist Perceptions of Islam: Observing the Observer. *Asian Survey* 31(3).
- Ahmed, Leila 1992 *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ajwad, A.C. Sheik Mohammed 1970 The Ancestors of Abdul Cader Sheik Mohammed Ajwad of Matara. *Moors Islamic Cultural Home Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1944-1969*. Colombo.
- Ali, Ameer 1981 The 1915 Racial Riots in Ceylon (Sri Lanka): A Reappraisal of its Causes. *South Asia* 4(2).
- 1984 *Islamic Revivalism in Harmony and Conflict: The Experience in Sri Lanka and Malaysia*. *Asian Survey* 24(3).
- 1986a Muslim Participation in the Export Sector of Sri Lanka 1800-1915. In M.A.M. Shukri ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, Beruwela:Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp235-252).
- 1986b *Politics of Survival: Past Strategies and Present Predicament of the Muslim Community in Sri Lanka*. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* X(X).

- 1987 Muslims and Capitalism in British Ceylon (Sri Lanka): The Colonial Image and Community's Behaviour. *Journal Institute of Minority Affairs*. Vol 8:2 July (pp311-344).
- Azeez, I.L.M. Abdul. 1957 *A Criticism of Mr Ramanathan's "Ethnology of the 'Moors' of Ceylon"*. Originally published under the auspices of the Moors' Union, Colombo in 1907. Colombo: The Moors' Islamic Cultural Home Incorporated.
- Banks, David J. 1976 Islam and Inheritance in Malaya: culture conflict or Islamic Revolution? *American Ethnologist*. 3 (4):573-86.
- Barth, F. 1960 The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North Pakistan. In E. Leach ed., *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Battuta, Ibn 1983 *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*. translated by H.A.R. Gibb, ed., [1929] London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bawa, Ahamadu 1888 The Marriage Customs of the Moors of Ceylon. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (Ceylon Branch). Vol X. No. 35, pp219-233.
- Beck, Brenda 1969 Colour and Heat in South Indian Ritual. *Man* 4(4):553-572.
- Beck, Lois & Nikki Keddie eds., 1978 *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press
- Blackton, Charles S. 1970 The Action Phase of the 1915 Riots. *Journal of Asian Studies*. XXIX (2) Feb 1970. pp235-254.
- Boddy, Janice 1982 Womb as Oasis: the symbolic context of Pharaonic circumcision in rural Northern Sudan. *American Ethnologist* 9 pp682-89
- 1988 Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan : the cultural therapeutics of possession and trance. *American Ethnologist* 15(1)
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1973 The Berber House. In Mary Douglas ed., *Rules and Meaning*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- 1987 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [1977]
- Bowen, John 1984 Death and the History of Islam in Highland Aceh. *Indonesia* (Ithaca) No 38 October
- 1987 Islamic Transformations: From Sufi Doctrine to Ritual practice in Gayo Culture. In Kipp and Rodgers eds *Indonesian Religions in Transition*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.



- 1993 *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boxer, C.R. 1969 *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Buss, Andreas E. 1985 ed., *Max Weber in Asian Studies*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Chauduri, K.N. 1985 *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clammer, John 1978 *Islam and Capitalism in Southeast Asia*. Sociology Working Paper No 63 N.U.S. Singapore: Chopmer.
- Cohen, Abner 1969 *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Collis, Maurice 1946 *The Land of the Great Image: Being Experiences of Friar Manrique in Arakan*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Combs-Schilling, M.E. 1989 *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Crapanzano, V 1973 *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Currie, P.M. 1992 *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-din Chishti of Ajmer*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dale, Stephen F. 1980 *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier. The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1986 *Review of Islam in Asia*. In Yohanan Friedman ed., *South Asia*. Vol 1. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Dale, S.F. & M.G. Menon 1978 *Nerccas: Saint-Martyr Worship Among Muslims in Kerala*. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, XLI, No. 3, pp523-38.
- Delaney, Carol 1991 *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Denny, Frederick M. 1985 *Islamic Ritual: Perspective and Theories*. In Richard C. Martin ed., *Approaches To Islam In Religious Studies*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.
- De Silva, C.R. 1966 *Portuguese Policy Towards the Muslims of Ceylon*. C.J.H.S.S. 9:113-119.
- 1978 *The Portuguese and Pearl Fishing of South India and Sri Lanka*. *South Asia New Series* 1(1) pp14-28.

- 1986 Muslim Traders in the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century and the Portuguese Impact. In M.A.M.Shukri ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity* Beruwala: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp147-165).
- De Silva, K.M, ed., *Sri Lanka : A Survey*.  
1977 London: C Hurst.
- 1981 *A History of Sri Lanka*.  
Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 1986a Muslim Leaders and the Nationalist Movement. In M.A.M.Shukri.ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp453-472).
- 1986b The Muslim Minority in a Democratic Polity : The Case of Sri Lanka. Reflections on a Theme. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp443-451).
- Dewaraja, Lorna  
1986 The Muslims in the Kandyan Kingdom (c1600-1815): A Study of Ethnic Integration. In M.A.M.Shukri ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwala: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp211-234).
- D'Souza, Victor S.  
1978 Status Groups among the Moplahs on the South-west Coast of India. In Imtiaz Ahmad ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India*. New Delhi: South Asia Books.
- Dube, Leela  
1969 *Matriliny and Islam: Religion and Society in the Laccadives*. Delhi: National Publishing House.
- Dumont, Louis  
1980 *Homo Hierarchicus : The Caste System and Its Implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dwyer, Kevin  
1982 *Moroccan Dialogues*.  
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ellis, R.H.  
1924 *A Short Account of the Laccadive Islands and Minicoy*. Madras : The Government Press.
- Eickelman, Dale  
1976 *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Centre*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- 1977 Ideological Change and Regional Cults: Maraboutism and Ties of "Closeness" in Western Morocco. In Richard P. Werbner ed., *Regional Cults*. A.S.A. Monograph 16. London: Academic Press.
- 1982 The Study of Islam in Local Contexts. *Contributions to Asian Studies*. Vol 17 pp 1-16.
- Endress, Gerhard  
1988 *An Introduction to Islam*. transl. by Carole Hillenbrand. New York: Columbia University Press.



- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*.  
1949 . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fernando, P.T.M. The Post Riots Campaign for Justice. *Journal of Asian Studies*. 29 (2) pp 255-266.  
1970
- Fernea, Elizabeth W. & Robert A. Fernea Variation in Religious Observance Among Islamic Women. In Nikkie R. Keddie ed., *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*.  
1972
- Forbes, Andrew Studies in Indian Ocean Islam: Caste and Matriliney in the Laccadive Islands. *Religion* 8 (1) Spring.  
1978
- 1981 Southern Arabia and the Islamicisation of the Central Indian Archipelagoes. *Archipel*. 21 (55-92).
- 1983 The Mosque in the Maldiv Islands: A Preliminary Historical Survey. *Archipel* 26 pp43-74.
- Fruzetti, Lina & Akos Ostor eds., *Kinship and Ritual in Bengal: Anthropological Essays*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers.  
1984
- Gaborieau, Marc Life Cycle Ceremonies of Converted Muslims in Nepal and Northern India. In Yohanan Friedman ed., *Islam in Asia Vol I* Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University.  
1984
- 1992 A Nineteenth-Century Indian 'Wahhabi' Tract Against the Cult of Muslim Saints: Al-Balagh al-Mubin. In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Geertz, Clifford *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. [1968] Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
1971
- Geijbels, M Aspects of the Veneration of Saints in Islam, With Special Reference to Pakistan. *The Muslim World*. Vol 68 pp178-186.  
1978
- Gellner, Ernest *Saints of the Atlas*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, University of Chicago Press.  
1969
- 1972 Doctor and Saint. In Nikki Keddie ed., *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1981 *Muslim Society*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- 1985 *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization. The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean.* Religion and Society 25. Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers.
- Gerholm, Tomas 1977 *Market, Mosque and Mafraj: Social Inequality in a Yemeni Town.* Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology 5. Department of Anthropology: University of Stockholm.
- Gilsenan, Michael 1973 *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1993 *Recognising Islam: An Anthropologists Introduction.* [1982] London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Gladney, Dru 1987 *Muslim Tombs and Ethnic Folklore: Charters for Hui identity.* *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol 46, No.3 August 1987.
- 1991 *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic.* Published by Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University. Cambridge Mass.:Harvard University Press.
- Glassé, Cyril 1989 *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam.* London: Stacey International.
- Gluckman, Max 1955 *Custom and Conflict in Africa.* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goldziher, Ignaz 1977 *Muslim Studies* Vol II. ed., S.M.Stern, trans C.R.Barber & S.M.Stern Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Good, Anthony 1983 *A Symbolic Type and its Transformations: the case of South Indian Ponkal.* *Contributions to Indian Sociology.* n.s. 17 (2) pp223-244.
- Goonewardena, K.W. 1986 *Muslims Under Dutch Rule up to the Mid-Eighteenth Century.* In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity.* Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 189-209).
- Gunawardana, R.A.L.H. 1979 *Robe and Plough : Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka.* Published for The Association of Asian Studies. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.
- Harahap, Basyral 1987 *Islam and Adat Among South Tapanuli Migrants in Three Indonesian Cities.* In Rita Smith Kipp & Susan Rogers eds., *Indonesian Religions in Transition.* Tuscon:University of Arizona Press.
- Hastrup, Kristen 1995 *A Passage To Anthropology: between experience and theory.* London: Routledge.



- Herklots, G  
1921 *Islam in India or the ganun-i-Islam : The Customs of the Musalmams of India Comprising a Full and Exact Account of the Various Rites and Ceremonies from the Moment of Birth to the Hour of Death.* London: n.p.
- Hooker, M.B.  
1974 *Adat and Islam in Malaya. Bijdragen tot de taal,-land-en volkenkinde.* 130:69-89.
- Hourani, G.F.  
1963 *Arab Sea-faring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times.* Beirut:Khayats 1903. Khayats Oriental Reprints No 3 reprinted with permission from Princeton Oriental Studies Vol 13. (copyright 1952 Princeton University Press).
- Hussainmiya, B.A.  
1986 *Princes and Soldiers: The Antecedents of the Sri Lanka Malays.* In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity.* Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp279-309).
- Irshard, Saeed M.  
1969 *Nazrath.* Tenth Anniversary Publication of Islamic Youth Maglis. Weligama. Nucleus in Arabic from Durrathunnasiheen Fil Wauli Wal Irahard. By the kind courtesy of Moulavi Al-Haj H. Salahudeen (Baari). Translated by 'Saeedson' Irshard. Saeed Mohammed Irshard. Ass. Sec. University of Ceylon. Peradeniya.
- Indrapala, K.  
1986 *The Role of Peninsula Indian Muslim Trading Communities in the Indian Ocean Trade.* In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity.* Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 113-127).
- Jayawardena, Kumari  
1970 *Economic and Political Factors in the 1915 Riots.* *Journal of Asian Studies.* XXIX (2) pp 223-233.
- Jeffrey, Patricia  
1979 *Frogs In a Well.* London: Zed Press.
- Johns, A.H.  
1975 *Islam in Southeast Asia: Reflections and New Directions.* *Indonesia.* (Ithaca), 19:33-55. April
- Jones, Russell  
1979 *Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia.* In Nehemia Levtzion ed., *Conversion to Islam.* New York: Holmes and Meier.
- Kapferer, Bruce  
1983 *A Celebration of Demons.* Bloomington: Indiana Press.
- 1988 *Legends of People Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kearney, Robert N.  
1970 *The 1915 Riots in Ceylon: A Symposium.* Introduction. *Journal of Asian Studies.* XXIX (2) pp219-222.

- Kessler, Clive S. Islam, society and political behaviour: some comparative implications the Malay case. 1972 *British Journal of Sociology*. Vol 23 pp 33-50.
- Khan, Muhammad Ishaq The Significance of the Dargah of Hazratbal in the Socio-Religious and Political Life of Kashmiri Muslims. In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1992
- Kipp, Rita Smith & Susan Rodgers. Indonesian Religions in Society. In Rita Smith Kipp & Susan Rodgers eds., *Indonesian Religions in Transition*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 1987
- Kiribamune, Sirima Muslims and the Trade of the Arabian Sea with Special Reference to Sri Lanka from the Birth of Islam to the Fifteenth Century. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 89-112). 1986
- Kolenda, Pauline *Caste in Contemporary India: Beyond organic solidarity*. Illinois: Waveland Press. 1978
- Kotelawele, D.A. Muslims Under Dutch Rule In Sri Lanka 1638-1796. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp167-209). 1986
- Kulasuriya, Ananda Regional Independence and Elite Change in the Politics of 14th Century Sri Lanka. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. No 2. pp 136-155. 1976
- Kutty, A. R. *Marriage and Kinship in an Island Society*. University of Saugar Monographs in Anthropology and Sociology ed., S.C. Dube. National: Delhi. 1972
- Lawrence, Bruce Early Indo-Muslim Saints and Conversion. In Yohanen Friedman ed., *Islam in Asia Vol I South Asia*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press. 1984
- Leach, Edmund ed., *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*. Cambridge papers in Social Anthropology 2. [1960] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1979
- Legge, James *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Being an account of the Chinese monk Fa Hien of his travels in India and Ceylon (AD 399-414) in search of the Buddhist books of discipline. Paragon Book Reprint Corp., New York, Dover Publications Inc: New York. 1965[1886]
- Lewis, I.M. Conformity and Contrast in Somali Islam. In I.M.Lewis ed., *Islam in Tropical Africa*. London: International African Institute in association with Indiana University Press. Second Edition [1966]. 1980



- McGilvray, Dennis 1973 Caste and Matriclan Structure in Eastern Sri Lanka: A Preliminary Report on Fieldwork in Akkaripattu. *Modern Ceylon Studies*. Vol 4 (1).
- 1974 *Tamils and Moors; caste and matriclan structure in Eastern Sri Lanka*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. University of Chicago.
- 1982 Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil Caste and Matriclan Ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. In *Caste Ideology and Interaction*. Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology No. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1983 Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol 24. pp 235-263.
- 1989 Households in Akkaraipattu: Dowry and Domestic Organization Among the Matrilineal Tamils and Moors of Sri Lanka. In John Gray & David Mearns eds., *Society From The Inside Out*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mahroof, M.M.M. 1985 The Enactment of 'Wakf' Legislation in Sri Lanka: The Law in Context. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Vol 6 (2) July 1985 pp 283-294.
- 1987 The Enactment of Muslim Marriage and Divorce Legislation in Sri Lanka: The Law in Context. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Vol 8 (1) Jan 1987 pp 161-175.
- 1990a The Malays of Sri Lanka. *Asian Affairs*. London (Series 2/new series) Vol XXI Feb 1 1990 pp55-65.
- 1990b Impact of European-Christian Rule on the Muslims of Sri Lanka: a Socio-historical Analysis. *Islamic Studies* 29 (4).
- 1991 Islamic Foundations of Sri Lankan Muslim Education. *Hamdard Islamicus*. Vol.XIV No.3. Fall 1991 pp 5-23.
- 1992 Teaching of Arabic Among the Muslims of Sri Lanka, (A Socio-Linguistic Study). *Hamdard Islamicus*. Vol.XV No.4. Winter 1992 pp 15-29.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw 1987 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul [1922].
- Ma'ruf, A.Muhammad 1986 A Sociology of Muslims in Southern India and Sri Lanka. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 319-336).

- Marx, Emmanuel 1977 Communal and Individual Pilgrimage: The Region of Saint'Tombs in South Sinai. In R.A.Werbner ed., *Regional Cults*. A.S.A. Monographs 16. London: Academic Press.
- Mauroof, Mohammed 1972 Aspects of Religion, Economy and Society among the Muslims of Ceylon. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. n.s. VI pp66-83.
- 1980 Muslims in Sri Lanka: Historical, Demographic and Political Aspects. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*. I:2 & II:1 pp183-193.
- 1990 Muslim Communities in Southern India and Sri Lanka:Population, Traders and Agriculture. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* pp167-180.
- Metcalf, Barbara Daly 1984 *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miller, Roland E. 1976 *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends*. Madras: Orient Longman.
- 1992 (revised edition).
- Minault, Gail 1984 Some reflections on Islamic revivalism Vs assimilation among Muslims in India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. (n.s.) 18.2:301-05
- Mines, Mattison 1972 *Muslim Merchants; the Economic Behaviour of an Indian Muslim Community*. New Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial relations.
- 1975 Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India. *Man* Vol 10 (3) September 1975.
- 1978 Social Stratification Among Muslims Tamils in Tamil-nadu South India. In Imtiaz Ahmad ed., *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:South Asia Books.
- Misra, P.K. & A.K. Tiwari 1981 Life and Society in Lakshadweep. *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*. 16: 231-246.
- Mohan, Vasundhara 1985 *Muslims of Sri Lanka*. Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers.
- 1987 *Identity Crisis of Sri Lankan Muslims*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Moini, Syed Liyaqat Hussain 1992 Rituals and Customary Practices at the Dargah of Ajmeer. In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*. Delhi: Oxford.
- Momin, A.R. 1978 Muslim Caste in an Industrial Township of Maharashtra. In Imtiaz Ahmad ed., *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India*. New Delhi:South Asia Books.



- Moosajee, Asker S. Recent Arrival of Muslim trading Communities in Sri Lanka. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp311-317). 1986
- Mukundan, T.K. *Laksha Dweep: A Hundred Thousand Islands*. Haryana: The Academic Press. 1979
- Nanda, Bikram N. & Mohammad Talib Soul of the Souless: An Analysis of Pir-Murid Relationships in Sufi Discourse. In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*. Delhi: Oxford 1992
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossain The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective. *Studies in Comparative Religion*. 1980 14 (1 & 2). 1980
- Obeyesekere, Gannanath *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*. 1984 Chicago:University of Chicago Press.
- Ortner, S & H. Whitehead ed., *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. 1981 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters, Emrys L. *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica: Studies in Personal and Corporate Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990
- Phadnis, Urmila Political Profile of the Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka. *International Studies* 18 (1) (pp 27-48). 1979
- Plumb, J.H. Introduction. *The Portuguese Sea-borne Empire 1415-1825* by C.R.Boxer. Middlesex, England:Penguin Books. 1969
- Polo, Marco *The Travels*. Translated by R Latham. 1987[1958] Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Queyroz, Fr Fernao de, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of the Island of Ceylon*. Transl. by Fr.S.G., Perera, 3 vols. Colombo: Government Printer. 1930
- Ramanathan, Ponambulam The Ethnology of the "Moors" of Ceylon. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch) Vol X. No 36 pp 234-262. 1888
- Roberts, Michael *Collective Identities: Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Marga Institute. 1979
- 1982 *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931*. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.
- 1989 A Tale of Resistance: The Story of the Arrival of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka. *Ethnos*. 1989: 1-2. Stockholm.
- Rodinson, Maxime *Islam and Capitalism*. translated by B.Pearce. [f.p.1966 France] London: Allen Lane. 1974

- Roff, William R. 1984 The Meccan Pilgrimage: Its Meaning for Southeast Asian Islam. In Raphael Israeli & Anthony Johns eds., *Islam in Asia* Vol II. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- 1985 Pilgrimage and the History of Religions: Theoretical Approaches to the Hajj. In Richard C. Martin ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*. Tuscon: University of Arizona.
- 1985b Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia. *Archipel* 29
- Ryan, Bryce 1953 *Caste in Modern Ceylon*. New Brunswick, N.J.
- Saiyed, A.R. 1992 Saints and Dargahs in the Indian Subcontinent: A Review. In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India*. Delhi: Oxford
- Saiyid, A.R. 1981 Ideal and Reality in the Observance of Moharram: A Behavioural Interpretation. In Imtiaz Ahmad ed., *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India*. Colombia: South Asia Books
- Samarasinghe, S.W.R.de A, and Fazal Davood. 1986 The Muslim Minority of Sri Lanka: A Business Community in Transition. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 253-278).
- Samaraweera, Vijaya 1978 Some Sociological Aspects of the Muslim Revivalism in Sri Lanka. *Social Compass*. Vol XXV, 3-4, 465-475.
- 1979 The Muslim Revivalist Movement, 1880-1915. In Michael Roberts ed., *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and protest in Modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Marga Institute (pp 243-276).
- 1986 Aspects of the Muslim Revivalist Movement in Late Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka. In M.A.M. Shukri. ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute (pp 363-383).
- Schreuder, Jan 1946 *Selections From the Dutch Records of the Ceylon Government, No. 5 Memoir of Jan Schreuder Governor of Ceylon [1762]*. Translated by E. Reimers. Sri Lanka: State Printing Corporation.
- Seneviratne, H.L. 1978 *Rituals of the Kandyan State*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology No 22. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Shukri, M.A.M. *Al-Makri*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Edinburgh.
- 1986 ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwela, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute.



- Siegel, James  
1969 *The Rope of God.*  
Berkeley:University of California Press.
- Spooner, Brian J.  
1963 *The Function of Religion in Persian Society.*  
*Iran.* 1:83-95
- Tambiah, S.J.  
1976 *World Conqueror and World Renouncer : A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a historical Background.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tapper, Nancy & Richard Tapper  
1987 *The Birth Of The Prophet: Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam.* *Man* (n.s.) Vol 22. No.1 March 1987, pp 69-92.
- Tennent, Sir J.E.  
1859 *Ceylon: An Account of the Island.* 2 Vols  
London:
- Thawfeeq, M.M.  
n.d. *Muslim Mosaics.* An 'El Eslam' publication  
Moors Islamic Cultural Home. Colombo.
- Tibbetts, G.R.  
1956 *Pre-Islamic Arabia and South-East Asia.* *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.* XXIX, 3 August 1956, pp 182-208.
- Tirmizi, S.A.I.  
1992 *Mughal Documents Relating to the Dargah of Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chisti.* In Christian W. Troll ed., *Muslim Shrines in India.* Delhi: Oxford
- Troll, Christian W.ed.,  
1992 *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, Bryan S.  
1974 *Weber and Islam, a Critical Study.*  
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Turner, Victor  
1969 *The Ritual Process:Structure and Anti-structure.*  
Harmondsworth:Penguin.
- Van Binsbergen, W.M.J.  
1980 *Popular and Formal Islam, and Supra-local Relations: The Highlands of North-Western Tunisia, 1800-1970.* *Middle Eastern Studies.* Vol 20:71-91.
- Van Bruinessan, M  
1987 *New Perspectives in Southeast Asian Islam? Bijdragen, 143 (4e) Aflevering.* pp519-538
- Von Grunebaum, G.E.  
1988 *Muhammadan Festivals.*  
London: Curzon Press.[1951]
- Waardenburg, Jacques  
1978 *Official and Popular Religion in Islam.* *Islam and Society.* Special Issue of *Social Compass* Vol XXV, No 3-4 pp 315-341.
- 1979 *Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies.* In P.H.Vrijhof & J.Waardenburg eds., *Official and Popular Religion.* The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- 1985 *Islam as a Vehicle of Protest.* In E.Gellner ed., *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization.* Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers.